

HEARTS

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OF

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THESE COLLECTIONS

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BY THE EDITOR.

1817.

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BY

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"A MODEL FATHER," "VAL STRANGE" ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HEARTS.

CHAPTER I.

TOM felt, as he and his cousin walked together after leaving the theatre, that Mark's manner had never seemed half so agreeable or befitting. He did not think this, but he felt it warmly. There was no shyness about Mark, as there would have been about some men in the circumstances, and there was no pretence of there being nothing the matter.

"Tom," said Mark, "I want to have a serious talk with you. I want to ask you to answer one question I shall put to you."

"I will if I can," said Tom, not guessing what the question might be.

"Then," began Mark, stopping short in the street and facing his cousin with a serious brow, "is there anything between yourself and your father

which is not known to me? Anything more than that row at the Megatherium?"

"Nothing that I know of," Tom answered. "Why?"

"I am obliged to move slowly," said Mark, taking his cousin's arm again, and walking with thoughtful eyes upon the pavement. "I dare not appeal to him too often, but I want to see you reconciled, and I mention you when I dare. But lately he has dropped a hint or two of your having offended him in other ways."

"In what other ways?" asked Tom, a little angrily.

"Well, you see," said Mark, musingly, "he doesn't speak straight out, and I don't want to make him angry by questioning; but so far as I can gather, he has a notion that you've been living in rather an immoral way up here."

"Who?" cried Tom, coming to a standstill. "I? How?"

"My dear fellow," said Mark, in a propitiatory way, "don't fly out at me. I am only trying to get at the bottom of the thing. Don't be offended if I go on. Has there ever been or is there now any entanglement between you and——? Come, Tom, I'm not a Joseph myself, and I never professed to be. Is there a lady in the case at all, or has there been?"

"You might have answered any charge of that sort," returned Tom, "out of your knowledge of me."

"If there is such a charge, there is no truth in it?"

"Not an atom," said Tom, quietly enough.

"Have you made an enemy?" asked Mark. "Is there anybody with a grudge against you?"

"Not a soul I know of."

"Tom," said Mark, suddenly, after a pause, "don't you think you ought to write to the governor and make some approach to him? Don't answer yet. Don't you think you might make allowance for him, and even humiliate yourself a little for his sake?"

"Mark," said Tom, in answer, in a voice which showed how moved he was, "if my father had been a poor man I would have gone to him next day, and would have told him that I had not done well in risking his peace of mind to save Miss Moore an inconvenience. But he is a rich man, Mark, and he was as much in the wrong as I was. If he had not refused to believe me, I would have proved my case, since he demanded it. He had a right to demand it, but he had no right to think me a liar. That is a right I never yet gave to any man."

"Without an advance from you," said Mark, "a reconciliation does not look hopeful. He is beginning to think all manner of evil things about you."

"It's a great pity," said Tom with a sigh, "but it can't be helped." He thought of the difference the last few months had made in his position and prospects, and his heart sank at it; but there came the natural revulsion of defiance, and this extended itself to his father. "He must do what he will and think what he will. I must

fight my own way in the world. I should be happy in his good opinion; but, much as I value it, I prefer my own, and I will not lose that at least."

Mark sighed audibly.

"There's a pair of you," he said. "Irreconcilables both." To this his cousin returned no answer, and they walked on quietly for a hundred yards or so. "Tom," began Mark again, "I give you my word of honour that I feel my own position keenly. Perhaps I am a bit cowardly about myself for one thing. You know how helpless I am in the world. I'm like a child. I never earned a penny in my life."

"You had a client once," said Tom.

"Yes," said Mark, fortunately recalling his statement about Bethesda. "I earned a ten-pound note once; but it came to the same thing—I never got it. I am dependent on your father, and since my own governor died, I always have been. Well, you know, you and I have looked forward to his doing something for me finally, and now he's in such a mood that if I pushed your case too far he'd send me packing after you, and found a hospital. Now that would be good neither for me nor you, and it wouldn't be comfortable for him. And all the time I am in a false position. I am ill thought of in many quarters where I would rather stand well, because people say what a cold-blooded thing it is for a fellow to accept a position which holds father and son apart. They don't know what I am trying to do, and would hardly believe me if I told them. Now, can't you

make me your mediator? Can't I say we met, and that you spoke kindly of him and all that sort of thing, and expressed your sorrow for having troubled him?"

"I can do nothing, and say nothing, that does not lay me open to suspicion," answered Tom. "You may tell him what I have said already, if you like. Does he seem to feel the thing much, Mark?"

"He doesn't show a great deal," Mark answered, "but then you know his way."

Yes, Tom admitted, he knew his father's way. The future was beginning to look blank to Tom; his money failure in connection with the opera tormented him, and his ideas seemed to have run dry, so he made no progress, to speak of, with opera number two. His troubles were closing fast upon him, and all the lesser troubles he endured drove him towards one much greater. His love affair looked especially hopeless, and that was the one thing he could least endure not to hope about. It seemed as if to take his hope of that were to take all, and the more he thought of it the less possible it seemed to marry and become a pensioner on Lording's bounty. It is probable enough that, like many other people, he made most of his own troubles for himself, but home-made troubles are no more savoury than those of foreign manufacture, and the lad's mild gorge rose to them.

"I say," quoth Mark, rather suddenly, "is that your own speculation, Tom—that theatre?"

"Yes," said Tom, with no great sprightliness of tone.

"Is it paying?"

"Losing fast."

"Shall you drop it?"

"I dare not—at least not just yet."

"It seems to me, Tom, that unless your governor relents, you are in a bad way."

"A very bad way indeed, Mark; but not so bad a way that it may not be mended."

"You must let me say something to your father. Give me a message to him."

"No. You are a good fellow, Mark, but that affair must take its course. I can't beg for a right as a favour. I didn't deserve to be thrown over, and I can't ask to be taken back again."

This talk brought them to Tom's door. Mark declined to enter just then.

"Think it over, Tom. I've said what I wanted to say. Think it over, Tom. I'll call to-morrow at mid-day, if that will suit you. Good-night, old man."

He wrung Tom's hand hard and walked away hurriedly.

"He's a good fellow, is Mark," said Tom to himself, standing on the doorstep and looking after his cousin's retreating figure. "A good fellow."

"An odd thing," said Mark, falling into a saunter as he turned the corner into that street in which he had first met the charming Signora. "A curious thing how being in the fashion makes one fond of the fashion. Since I took to having respectable motives it is wonderful to notice what

a hold they've taken on me. I shall end in believing myself like the rest of them. We're poor creatures—all frail alike," concluded Mark, with a laugh to himself. "All frail alike."

As he walked down the street thinking, he passed a solitary passenger, who looked keenly at him and quickened his step a little, as if to keep pace with him for a moment and make sure of him. This solitary passenger was Signor Malfi.

"You are still in London, my friend," said the Signor silently, when he was sure of him. "Let me see where you live."

He followed, but not for any great distance, for at the end of the street a voice he knew hailed Mark Carroll by name, and the Signor crossed the street in the darkness to avoid his countryman, Baretti.

"You are back in London?" said Baretti. "Have you seen your cousin?"

"I have just left him," returned Mark. "You have some influence with him. Beg him to follow my advice. It is the only way to a reconciliation with his father."

"What is your advice?" asked Baretti.

"That he should seek the reconciliation," returned Mark. "That he should make the first advances."

"Do you think the advances likely to be accepted?" asked Baretti.

"I think it well worth while to try. I've told Tom so, but he's pig-headed."

"I am anxious to serve him if I can," said

the painter. "Shall I walk with you whilst you tell me what to do?"

Mark accepted this offer, and the two went on together arm in arm. Signor Malfi, who had been standing in the darkness fifty yards further down the street, walked leisurely until they passed him, and then followed.

"You have met my uncle and have seen enough of him to know how unlikely it is that any advance should come from him. He is a man of prodigious firmness—not to say obstinacy—but one of the kindest-hearted men in the world. Tom must pocket in his pride and make submission." Baretti nodded here and there as Mark talked, and the disinterested cousin grew warm with his theme.

"Take no notice of the thing now," said Baretti, breaking in on the current of Mark's speech. "But do you know why you are being followed?"

"Followed?" asked Mark, quietly. "What do you mean? Why should I be followed?"

"There is a friend of mine behind us," said the painter, "who has a grievance against you. He was behind you when I met you, but thinking that I did not see him, he crossed the road and waited. Now he is coming on again."

"A friend of yours who has a grudge against me?" asked Mark. "And who may that be?"

"Count twenty paces beyond the next lamp," said Baretti. "Then turn, and you will have him in the light."

So said, so done. Mark knew well enough of whom Baretti spoke, and was not surprised at

being followed, though the sensation he experienced was far from being comfortable. He and Baretti wheeled round suddenly at the point agreed upon, and Signor Malfi came to a dead stop for a second, or so, and then walked on towards them. Mark stood on the alert, waiting for what might happen. He had not long to wait, for Malfi cut right at his face with the walking-cane he carried. Mark warded the blow with his own cane, but before he could return it, Baretti had got in between them, and for a minute or two the painter and the singer made a great hubbub with expostulation on the one side and execration on the other. Mark kept quiet and watched, cool and wary. To have a quarrel with Signor Malfi would not suit him at all, for he was severely moral at Trench House, and enjoyed a reputation for another and more genial sort of morality—unstarched, but unsmirched—in its neighbourhood; and the revelations which might come of a fracas with the popular tenor would militate against his reputation. On the other side, Malfi cared little for the prospect of a bout at fisticuffs, and repented his flush of passion already. So with both unwilling to fight, the promised battle was postponed, but the assailant cursed from behind Baretti with Italian fluency, and let out all the story. This was, of course, unpleasant for Mark, who had tried to make something of a cat's paw of his cousin in this matter, and who knew that the story would go from Baretti to Tom. Even such a fool as Tom might scarcely like to have been used as a blind in such an affair,

and for the present it was part of Mark's plan that Tom should think well of him.

"I have no appetite for a street brawl," said Mark, in English, "and the man is mad with an absolutely groundless jealousy."

"What does he say?" cried Malfi, with an energetic pretence of a desire to get past Baretti. Baretti, still keeping between him and Mark, translated, and the singer broke out with a new tirade. One foot-passenger paused long enough to hear all three speaking Italian, and, being in his own way a humourist, cried "Go it, Frenchy!" in a highly-exhilarated way.

"We shall have a crowd here in a moment," said Mark, in an undertone, to Baretti. "I shall walk on until I meet a policeman, and if your friend follows me I shall give him in charge."

So saying, he turned his back upon the two, and marched along, indifferent enough to outer seeming, but carrying his heart in his ears.

"You call yourself my friend," said Malfi, hotly, "and you consort with that dog."

"I consort with that dog for a purpose," said Baretti, "and I still call myself your friend. I must not lose him now. Let me follow him. Come to me to-morrow. What can you gain by a disturbance in the streets? I may help you to right your wrong in a way you do not dream of. Come to me to-morrow."

Malfi made no answer, but he allowed Baretti to follow Mark, and only stood to watch the two retreating figures until the night swallowed both of them. Then he shook his stick in the air, spat

on the pavement, and went his way. The painter came up with Mark at a run, and Mark, having assured himself that it was Baretti, and not Malfi, who pursued him, sauntered slowly to be the more readily overtaken.

"Thank you," he said, when Baretti came alongside, "I am very much obliged. About Tom, Signor Baretti; will you try and persuade him to make some approaches to his father?"

"I will advise him for the best," said Baretti. "It is a pity that so excellent a son and so kind a father should be divorced from each other."

"Isn't it?" said Mark, with an assent almost tender in its fervour.

"It is a pity, too," observed Baretti, "that my poor friend Malfi should be divided from his wife by so groundless a suspicion. So far as you are concerned she is innocent?"

"The man's a madman, pure and simple," said Mark, tranquilly. "I think the woman took a fancy to me, but that wasn't my fault. Ask my cousin Tom. He'll tell you that I asked him to sit out an Italian lesson I was giving her, to prevent her from making eyes at me." It was not easy to suspect so perfect a tactician.

"This is not the first I have heard of it," said Baretti, who also knew how to be candid. "Malfi told me the whole story. He said then what he repeated to-night, that he had tracked her to your chambers."

"She was fool enough to come there," Mark returned. "That was not my affair either. Whilst she was there Malfi turned up, and I hid her."

When he had gone away, I told her I couldn't stand that sort of nonsense, and that if it occurred again, I should have to take unpleasant measures. You read the English poets, Mr. Baretti, and you remember the line 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.' The beautiful Signora Malfi is the best illustration of that statement I have yet encountered. I'm not a Joseph myself," said Mark, for the second time that day. "But in this case I'm a martyr."

Mark's candour was his best weapon, but he could not quite kill Baretti's doubts of him.

"You disliked the woman?" the painter asked. "That is why you wished your cousin to go with you when you gave her the lesson you speak of?"

"Well, not exactly that," said Mark, with a light-hearted laugh. "But the game didn't seem worth the candle, and besides that, Malfi was a friend in a sort of a way, and there is honour, you know, even amongst gentlemen."

Baretti walked thoughtfully on and said nothing. The man made no pretence to be better than he was, and his easy cynicism made him ten times more readily believable than any moral profession could have done. And yet Baretti was not easy in his mind about him, and to doubt him on one point was to doubt him on all. Halt unconsciously he did doubt him at all points, and he began to have vague ideas that it was here if ever that his chance of being useful to Tom Carroll would arise. As if there were not real dragons enough about his friend's path already, he was in the mood to create fancy dragons for the pleasure

of killing them, and circumstances had given Mark so much influence over his cousin's life that Baretti was nine-tenths jealous of him. Now that he had come to think of it, he had never heartily liked Mark Carroll from the first, and a spice of that discontent which Mark confessed would have been natural in Tom began to flavour Baretti's fancies. What guarantee in the world was there that Mark should play fair with Tom? And what would the world think fairer play than to let things take their course? But if Mark allowed events to run on unguided it was likely that he and not Tom would inherit the Trench House estates. It began to be unbelievable, as Baretti considered these things, that any man would take the trouble to shake his own standing-ground unless he had a very strong reason for it—some passion of honour, or gratitude, or love. Now, not to be unduly suspicious, it did not seem likely that Mark Carroll was a man to nurse so fine a sense of honour as his present pretensions claimed for him, and, so far as the painter knew, he had no great call either to love or to gratitude.

Baretti had spoken all these half-proved fancies about Mark in his last words to Malfi, when he had said that he might help to right his countryman's wrongs in a way the other did not dream of. If Mark were pretending to serve Tom's interest while he played against him, there were not many revenges to which Baretti would not have thought it dignified to stoop.

"You are naturally anxious about your cousin," he said at last, "and I am naturally anxious about

my countryman. Whilst you try to reconcile father and son, I must try to reconcile husband and wife. Do you know that the lady is singing in your cousin's opera?"

"Yes," said Mark, since there was nothing to be got by ignorance. "I saw her there this evening."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No. I only saw her on the stage. Why the deuce *should* I speak to her?"

"People are very stupid," said Baretti, leaving Mark's query unanswered. "They quarrel without cause, and they give themselves and their friends a great deal of needless trouble. I will speak to your cousin, Mr. Carroll, and I will do my best for him. Good night."

"Good night," said Mark, in a voice which responded sympathetically to the weariness in Baretti's. "It's a poor world, Mr. Baretti, and one's best resource is not to care for it very much." He gripped the Italian's hand, said "Good-night" again, and walked towards his hotel. That unexpected disturbance with Malfi had been got out of well enough, and Mark was grateful to his own good fortune. But to have that sort of thing happening at odd times would be unpleasant, if at last the coward's passion did not make him dangerous. Mark was certain of Malfi's cowardice, but counted on no immunity from danger on that score; for he had had opportunities of studying the dirty side of human nature in the assize courts, and he knew of what base metal homicides are made.

But, apart from fears so tragic—and Mark was no coward—to have a man of that sort about, ready at any time to knock one's respectability to pieces was eminently undesirable, and yet to be rid of him seemed impossible. He could be dodged and evaded at times, no doubt, but then there was no certainty as to the time or place of his appearance.

Mark's cogitation on this matter bore fruit. It is noticeable that people out of one country neighbourhood often use the same town hotel, and would think it rather an unfitting thing to go to any other. It happened that Mark met in the Jermyn Street house two county youngsters with whom he had acquaintance at Overhill, and in his own bright, open-hearted way he fell talking about his cousin Tom. Of course all the county knew of the quarrel between father and son, and there was no breach of family confidence in speaking of it.

"He's as obstinate," said Mark, good-humouredly, "as a donkey, and he won't even ask his governor to come round. He's going the pace, too, up here, I can tell you. He's a thundering clever fellow, mind you, and you should go and hear that opera of his—the music's magnificent. But," continued Mark, with the laugh of a man who makes allowances, "he has kicked over the traces fairly now, and everybody who knows his game is a little sorry for it. They say Byron kept a harem, but it wasn't in London, and he didn't hire a stage to show his beautiful Circassians to the British public. Of course, that sort of thing

is no man's business but his own, but I'm very sorry for it. Don't you fellows breathe a word of this down at home. You won't, will you? It would ruin him with the old fellow for ever and ever."

Of course, the young men promised the most profound discretion.

"He got *me* into a bit of a mess a night or two ago," said Mark, laughing genially. "There's an Italian fellow, a tenor at the opera—Tom's a good deal mixed up with the opera people—and this fellow's wife took a fancy to Tom, and made a dead set at him. She's singing in 'Godiva' now, and has run away from her husband and attached herself to my charming cousin's fortunes. It's a bit awkward for me, for the operatic tenor had me pointed out as the man, and came at me with a thick stick. I don't suppose that Tom took any share in that business. He wouldn't let another fellow into a scrape of that kind knowingly. But if Tom's wild oat harvest answers to his sowing, I can prophecy a devil of a crop for him. Now, for heaven's sake, don't you fellows speak a word of this at home. I know I can trust your honour, or I wouldn't have spoken."

They promised faithfully, and went away to trust other people's honour, as Mark knew they would.

CHAPTER II.

MALFI did not call upon Baretti on the morrow. Perhaps he thought little of his countryman's promise of vengeance, and perhaps he was somewhat ashamed of his own ignominious bluster. But when he did call, the artist had something to say which interested him. Mark Carroll was a very clever young man, beyond a doubt, but even he was unable to count beforehand upon everything. He had naturally counted on the story reaching Lording's ears in one form or another, but he had not counted on the mode of Lording's reception of it. It set the old boy off as a spark starts a rocket, and he went at Tom to know the truth or falsehood of it, without an hour's delay. He found him in a dressing-gown, with a cigar in his mouth, a glass of brandy and soda on the table before him, and a disorderly litter of musical manuscripts all about the room. Now Lording could not tell of his own intuition that Tom had been at work all night, and the lad's worn aspect and the brandy and soda taken in conjunction looked bad to the old fellow's eyes.

Tom held out his hand, but, to his consternation, Lording declined to take it, and set himself firmly upon the hearthrug, with his hat in one hand and his walking-stick in the other.

"Tom Carroll," said the old boy, "I never do anything by halves. I won't shake hands by

halves. I won't condemn you unheard, and you shall have your say fairly and fully. What's the meaning of these scandals about you and the women at your theatre?"

"What scandals, sir?" asked Tom.

"All sorts of scandals, sir!" cried Lording. "Do you mean to say you don't know of them?"

"I have never heard of any," Tom returned.

"By gad, sir!" said Lording, "they say the place is a harem, and that you're the sultan of it. Orgies! I don't know what all."

"Who says so?" asked Tom, beginning to look dangerous.

"It's a matter of general talk," said Lording. "The country's ringing with it."

The youngster heaved a great sigh and threw his hands abroad.

"So far as I know," he replied, "the house is as orderly as any in London. I believe it is."

His momentary anger faded. He was out of spirits, and broken with overwork and anxieties and continuous heartache, and he scarcely cared just then for anything.

"You believe it is?" said Lording, half in grief and half in rage. "I don't want an answer like that. What do you know about this? Come, Tom, my lad, I've loved you like a son, and we stand in such a position that I've a right to ask you."

"The whole thing is a wicked invention," Tom answered, drearily. "Though why anybody should go about to invent a story of that sort against me, I can't guess."

"Nor I either," said Lording. "Tom, you

must let me get to the bottom of this. I must be able to contradict it, and I must be able to trace it to its source."

"Will you pursue your inquiries unhampered by me, sir?" asked Tom. "Will you make inquiries at the theatre, or cause inquiries to be made? I am a little tired of being suspected, and lied about, and disbelieved. By heaven!" he cried, suddenly, "I would be ashamed to ask a man of the truth or falsehood of a lie so palpable if I had known him a hundredth part as well as you know me."

"Tom," said Lording, "I am not to blame. I have a duty to perform—and so have you, for that matter. If these shameless charges are made against you, you must fight them. People are putting two and two together. They say your father had fuller reasons for throwing you over than were ever given to anybody."

"My father behaved to me, sir," said Tom, bitterly, "as no father had a right to behave to a son. All the rights are not on the father's side, and all the duties on the son's. If people are saying that, it is his business to contradict it, not mine."

"Yes, yes, Tom," said Lording; "your business as well as his. You must avoid the appearance of evil."

"Into what appearance of evil have I fallen?" Tom demanded.

"My lad," said Lording, who exercised wonderful patience, all things considered, "you

fall into a terrible appearance of evil if you refuse to contradict things like these."

"They will die of themselves," said Tom. "I shall never die of them."

"Well," said Lording, with something of an effort, "you'll tell me on your honour that there isn't one word of truth in this scandal, and I'll believe you against the world."

"Thank you," said Tom. "On my honour as a gentleman there is not one word of truth in it."

"Very well," said Loring; "the libel's done with—dead so far as I'm concerned. Now, who invented it? Who set it going? Is there anybody who has a grudge against you?"

Tom shook his head. "Not a soul I know of."

"You made a mistake before in refusing to defend yourself," said Lording, who was doing his hardest to be loyal. "You must track this down, Tom. You must hunt it down. You must clear yourself. And until you've done that, Tom—I don't feel happy in saying it, my lad—but until you've done it, I think you'd better not——"

"I understand you," said Tom, not without a little bitterness.

"Don't think me harsh, or unfriendly, Tom," said Lording, taking up the walking-stick and hat which he had only just laid down. "I can't help it. I'm very sorry, indeed; very sorry."

"You have your duty to do, sir," said the youngster, as manfully as he could.

"And you have yours," returned Lording. "Track the scandal down."

In the natural bitterness of his heart, Tom

made a rejoinder for which he was sorry many a time afterwards.

"I have opportunities," he said. "My friends give me plenty of elbow-room."

"Tom Carroll," said the old boy, with a paler face, "you have no right to say that sort of thing to me. I'm not the man to charge with giving a friend elbow-room when he's in trouble. I have accepted your word, and I believe this thing to be an abominable scandal. But it lies on you to clear yourself. All the help I can give you, you shall have; but I can't have a stain brought into the house my daughter lives in. Clear yourself. You can do it."

"How?" asked Tom, with unwonted passion. "Where am I to bring my charge? Give me the name of the man who told you the story?"

"The story's in the air," said Lording. "It's at every club in London, more or less. There's scarcely a house in which it isn't talked about."

"And I am to fight this impalpable libel? Not I!" he cried, in a heat of anger and despite. "I will tell you this, sir—there never was a man against whom this shameful charge would have been less true. You tell me you believe my word; but you don't believe me. You ask me to defend myself when I am charged, but not before. How *can* I defend myself against the blackguards who throw the mud of their own hearts at me in the dark? Defence! What defence has a man in such a case, except in the contempt of his assailants?"

This speech was a little incoherent; but then righteous anger is just as likely to be incoherent

as unrighteous anger, and when Tom let himself loose he began to feel wellnigh mad with rage and grief. That he of all men should be charged with wallowing in that hog-pen of sensual nastiness! The thought half choked him. One cruel and false estimate of him had robbed him of his love, and now a lie as wicked as was ever coined was circulating from hand to hand with his figure stamped on it as a beast's, to make him odious in all good men's eyes.

"If you have any pretensions to my daughter's hand," said Lording, "your own hands must be clean; and they must not only be clean, but men must know that they are clean. You can go out and track the story if you like. Almost anybody will tell it to you, or a part of it. I'm only just and fair to my own child—not cruel or unreasonable with you. Before you come to us again set yourself straight about this matter."

"We had better say goodbye at once, sir," Tom answered. "There can be no service in delay."

"Very well," said the old fellow, sorrowfully. He had no doubt that Tom was maligned, or he tried to believe that he had none, and he was grieved to the heart at the whole business. But his soul revolted at the thought of Mary's name being coupled with such a story, and he could do no other than he had done. "Clear yourself and come to me again," he said, at the door, "and you'll find me what I've always been."

"Thank you," said Tom, coldly.

"Tom," said Lording, turning for a last effort, "this lofty way of yours brought about the quarrel

with your father. People who know you will accept your word, perhaps; but your friends have a right to ask more of you than a bare denial. You haven't the right to grieve us all in this way." He paused, but received no answer. "Think it over, my lad," said Lording, in a voice which began to be untrustworthy, "and you'll see things as I do. Goodbye, my lad. There's no malice or disbelief in my mind, but I can't help myself. Goodbye, Tom."

"Good day, sir," said Tom, as coldly as before; and Lording, with a wistful look, went out.

Tom sat down at the table and began to push about the disorderly manuscripts upon it, but he could not distinguish one sheet from another, and in a while he arose and walked with irregular and disordered steps about the room. The tears of rage and shame and misery were hot in his eyes, but he fought them back and would not yield to them.

Whilst he was still in this unhappy state, Baretti came down in his velvet sacque, and his gay cap and slippers. His face beamed, and he entered the room with a fantastic step.

"Carroll," he began, "I have an inspiration. It is on canvas already. Come and look at it." Then he caught sight of Tom's wild face and ran towards him. "What is the matter? You are ill. What is it? Sit down, Carroll, sit down."

"Damn the whole base world!" cried Tom, flinging himself out of Baretti's hands. "Curse the foul-hearted, foul-mouthed hounds that fill it!"

"Carroll," cried the painter, "what is it?"

He had never seen his friend enraged before, and the youngster's aspect, commonly so bland and gentle, was frightfully altered now. His voice was hoarse with passion, his face was deadly pale and his eyes glared like a madman's. He was nearer the boundary line between madness and sanity at that moment than any man can go with safety. He felt it, and trembled for himself, and the tremour saved him. He leashed himself by one tremendous effort, and sat down in a quiet more terrible than his momentary violence. Baretti, alarmed by his aspect and the wildness of his words, and fearing to disturb him anew, kept silence for a time. Then he ventured once more to lay a hand upon his friend's shoulders, and said once more, in a voice as gentle as a woman's, "Carroll—my friend—dearest of my friends—what is it?"

Tom dropped his face into his hands, and a scalding tear or two had way in spite of him. He looked up with the moisture still glistening in his wild eyes.

"Go now, Baretti," he said, with a great effort. "Come in half an hour. I can't talk now." He waved Baretti away with a gesture of such mingled entreaty and command that the painter lingeringly retired, and went slowly up the stairs to his own room. Tom could hear him pacing to and fro, and, sore and bitter as he was, he found some comfort in his friend's nearness, and the certainty of his sympathy. In a minute or two at the most he began to recover his lost mastery of himself, and having bathed and dressed, he sat down to await Baretti. When the little man came

he saw the change in his friend's appearance and augured well of it, and Tom justified the augury, for he broke down no more, but told the story of Lording's visit with a calm almost judicial. Baretti, indeed, displayed the more emotion of the two, though he was careful—in the memory of Tom's late outbreak—to repress himself for his friend's sake.

There was a struggle in Baretti's heart the rage of which would not be easy to exaggerate in words. For if gratitude were a passion with him, his love for his friend's sweetheart none the less fought for unrivalled domination, and the hopes and joys that sprang up anew within him at this story were terrible in the fierce light of his own scorn and hatred of them, and the passion of his self-contempt. The manhood in him won the day, as it had done before, but the conflict left him shaken and hysterical.

"My cousin Mark," said Tom, when he had told the story, "gave me an inkling of some such charge against me."

"Your cousin Mark," said Baretti, with curious quiet, "is a very astute person, and he plays his game very well."

"What does this mean?" inquired Tom.

"It means," says Baretti, "that I suspect your cousin Mark to be the man who sets this story afoot. Listen, Carroll. Whose turn will this tale serve? Your cousin Mark's! Who is the one man in all the world who finds it to his interest to throw a cloud about your character? Your cousin Mark! Now listen. Speak if you like when I

have done. Is it a common characteristic of mankind to be so self-sacrificing as to throw over a fortune like your father's for a scruple of honour? Would not most men throw over the scruple for the fortune? And has not this fine cousin Mark of yours protested a little overmuch? And did you ever know him as a self-sacrificing man?"

"He never had a chance to be," said Tom; "he was always hard up, poor Mark. You're wrong, Baretti. Mark's too open for such a dastardly course as that, but he always pretended to be a cynic, and some people believed him."

"I have reason for distrusting him," said Baretti. "He was trying to make a stalking horse of you in that affair of Malfi's. You believe his innocence in that? I know him to be guilty. Signora Malfi confessed her perfidy to her husband, and defied him."

"He was not her husband," said Tom.

"Of that I know nothing," said Baretti, coolly. "And it is not material to the case. My argument is that he proclaimed his innocence to you, and that he was guilty, and that he used you and meant to use you as a screen. And I maintain that a man of whom that is true will stop at nothing. What? He abused your confidence and friendship to profit by them in an intrigue, and he will not abuse them to gain a fortune? Carroll, the truth is as the sun that shines in heaven. You told me that you found him locked in with Bethesda at the theatre"—Baretti was ready to take anything to throw at Mark—"What did that mean?"

Tom, on the other side, was willing to attack the weaker portions of Baretti's argument, and to leave the stronger parts untouched. A boar or tiger when wounded will charge at anything, but a gentleman is another sort of animal, and he was no more disposed to be suspicious of cousin Mark now than he would have been if this base libel had never hurt him.

"It meant nothing," he answered. "They locked the door because the ordinary latch didn't act. That was all." These aside suspicions weakened Baretti's case instead of strengthening it. It is always a good rule in criminal proceedings to charge no more than you can prove.

At this instant their talk found an unexpected diversion. They had already heard a ring at the front door, but had scarcely noticed it, and now, with a hurried knock, and no waiting for a response, in burst Lording, with a red face and panting breath, waving a newspaper in his hand.

"Have you told Mr. Baretti about this matter?" he asked. Tom nodded a surprised assent. "Then I can speak at once. You asked me just now what you were to fight. Fight that." And he flung the newspaper on the table. "It's a low rag, I know, but you can wipe your hands on it as well as if it were the 'Times' itself."

Tom took up the journal and looked at it. He knew it at a glance, for its name was commonly cried by hawkers about the streets, and he had heard it spoken of once or twice at the clubs and elsewhere as a sort of journalistic sewer. Civilisation, amongst other curious matter, has

given us this particular joy. The liberty of the press is a glorious thing, and with a great price bought our ancestors this freedom, but in this mixed world no blessing is unmixed. You may buy now-a-days the pure milk of the word, or, "turkey stuffed with truffles gay," if the dish suit you, and you may have either served in gold and silver, but the human porker likes his cabbage-stalk served in a gutter, and he gets it, seasoned to taste.

There was no difficulty in finding the paragraph Lording had come to show, for the old boy had marked it round with a quill pen in something of a triumphant rage, if the look of the heavy lines could be trusted. Tom read it with a sense of rising indignation and disgust. It was written with a high pretence of moral tone, and that was only natural, for the British porker, unlike his French brother, prefers an almost religious seasoning with his garbage. A moral tone can make even cabbage-stalks respectable, and they eat the better for respectability, delicious as they are without it.

"You'll fight that?" asked Lording, still breathing hard with haste.

"Yes," said Tom, with a pugnacious look which was strange to him. "I think I'll fight it. I am much obliged to you for bringing it."

"This brings the thing to a head, you see," said Lording, "and I am glad I chanced upon it."

"So am I," said Tom. "Heartily glad."

"You'd better come to my lawyer," said Lording. "This isn't in his line, but he'll tell

us the best man to go to, and we must begin at once."

They walked out and took a cab together, leaving Baretti at home. In less than half an hour they were closeted together with a shrewd criminal lawyer, and in ten minutes he knew as much of the case as he wanted to know at that stage.

"We prove publication to begin with," said the lawyer, "and will do that at once." He rang his bell. "Go to that address, Mr. Wilder, and purchase a copy of 'The Way of the World.' You may point out this paragraph, and may say that libel suit will be based upon it."

The clerk retired, and with another word or two the lawyer bowed out his visitors, and was deep in a fresh case in five minutes. Lording, having begun to fight on Tom's side, was disposed to go with him heart and soul, but there was one thing which weighed against the youngster. He spoke of it at last, though with reluctance.

"Tom," he said, as they walked towards Montague Gardens together, "I want to ask a question. I passed by the Garrick Theatre the other morning—it's a week or two ago now—and I saw a young woman hanging on to you in the street at the main entrance. I didn't like the look of it, and it made me readier to receive these stories than I should have been if I hadn't seen it. Now tell me, what was it?"

"I would rather not tell you yet," said Tom, to Lording's indignation, but the old boy's feelings were a little calmed by what follows. "She

is singing at the Garrick, and her name is Signora Malfi. If you will ask Baretti about her, he can tell you something, and I will fill in the rest."

Mark's scheme, ably as it had been built up, began to look shaky. Baretti told his story in answer to Lording's inquiry, and did more. He let loose his suspicions of Mark Carroll, and a seed or two of them fell in Lording's mind and took growth there. It was not easy for an open and generous nature like Lording's to give nutriment to a belief in a villany so shameless in any man he had familiarly known. He struggled against his conviction, if but feebly.

"No, no, Mr. Baretti, Mark isn't so bad as that. He *wanted* to put Tom straight with his father. He begged me to go down to him at once and mediate with him. I went down," said Lording, rubbing his head with a rueful look, "and like an old fool, I had a row with him, and made things worse than ever."

"Mr. Mark Carroll is a very astute young man indeed," said Baretti, with a smile which was not altogether pretty to look at.

"Why," cried Lording, glaring at him, "do you think he sent me down on purpose to have a row with his uncle?"

"Mr. Carroll," said the painter, "is the last man in the world with whose domestic concerns I should be inclined to meddle. His son and his friend will forgive me if I say that Mr. Carroll's sense of his own dignity is a little exaggerated. Mr. Lording will forgive me if I say that his own

warm temper and impetuous good-heartedness make him the last man in the world to send to Mr. Carroll on such a message at such a moment. And Mr. Mark may or may not forgive me if I say that he reckoned on that, and played his game with the cunning I gave him credit for."

"Pooh!" said Lording, feebly; but he was evidently confounded by Baretti's suspicion, and had no heart to make a fight against it.

"Mr. Mark Carroll's anxiety to be rid of his uncle's fortune is a little too pressing to my mind," said the painter. Everybody knows how easy it is to believe a thing by mere dint of talking about it, and by this time Baretti was confident of the truth of his suspicions, and saw the ground more and more plainly at his feet, and felt his steps more certain every minute. Lording began to share his doubts, and even Tom's belief in Mark was somewhat shaken.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Lording, at last. "I'll go and see Mark, and have a talk with him about it."

"And get angry with him in five minutes," said Baretti, with a laugh, to make the thing less biting, "and tell him the truth about himself, and put him on his guard. Forgive me, Mr. Lording. Let me go."

"I *am* a little hot-tempered, I'm afraid," said Lording, sorrowfully. "I fly out at things. I'm not fit to meddle with these matters, but if I promise that I'll hold my tongue will you take me with you, and let me judge him for myself?"

Baretti could scarcely refuse this, and in

effect they set out for Mark's hotel, and found the young man there in a state of warm indignation at the libellous paragraph, which had been put into his hand by a friend.

"Tom will prosecute for libel?" he asked.

"He has taken proceedings already," said Baretti.

"Right!" cried Mark, warmly, "I wish I were free to act for him, but my fear of losing my influence over his father ties my hands, and I can't do it. Will he institute a criminal prosecution, or go for damages? It's not of much use to go for damages, though, against a rag like that," scornfully indicating the journal, which lay upon the table of his room.

Lording looked at Baretti meaningly. Everything seemed open and above board about Mark. It was scarcely believable that a man could speak as he did and not mean it.

"How does Tom take it?" Mark asked. "I was going up to see him when you called. I leave town to-morrow, and he ought to be assured at once of the confidence and sympathy of all his friends. There ought to be a cat-o'-nine-tails for that sort of fellow," waving his hand again towards the journal. There was some truth in Mark's anger at the newspaper. The libellous paragraph gave Tom a chance to come forward with a contradiction so complete that it might excite even his father's sympathy for the undeserved shames he had endured. "The filthy scandal-mongers!" cried Mark, aloud, with an air of rage. "The babbling idiots!" he added, inwardly. "How

could I reckon on their stepping in to spoil my game?"

"Well," said Lording, when Mark had run upstairs to his bedroom for hat and gloves, "what do you think of him? Doesn't he look honest enough?"

"He plays well," said Baretti. "Wait and see."

CHAPTER III.

THE preliminary proceedings made Tom Carroll famous. They did more. They filled the Garrick Theatre night after night with an audience eager to see the ladies who were the subject of so engaging a scandal. If the lessee's arrangements had been less extravagantly made "Godiva" might have been worth money to him; but as things were, the inevitable, unvoidable loss went on, delayed or hastened by fluctuations, but continuous. Tom and Baretti had talked the thing thoroughly over, and had come to the conclusion that to attempt to lessen the expenses by discharging the famous artists who performed in the opera and engaging less famous and less able singers in their place would be suicidal. To spend now and to go on spending in reason so long as the public cared to fill the house seemed wise to both of them, because Tom would have it that all the money thus thrown broadcast was seed for the future, and Baretti was kept in ignorance of the amount of his resources.

"I have my mother's fortune," Tom would say, without a thought of deceiving Baretti as to its magnitude. The painter never guessed how slender his friend's resources were growing.

"Godiva" had already achieved a success large enough to impose Tom upon the ignorant public, but those who were behind the scenes—all theatrical critics, actors and singers, and professional musicians all over London, managers, theatrical agents, and publishers of music—were perfectly aware of the truth. The truth did nobody any harm—but as they supposed Tom Carroll to be a man of great wealth, some of them thought of a fool and his money, and the rapid partition which is said to be effected between them.

Tom would willingly have stopped the work and closed the theatre long before the great libel case came on, but he felt how disastrous a step that might be to him. He could foresee the construction the other side would put upon it, and in fancy he could see an eminent pleader of name unknown pounding an assize-court table, and informing the court that the alleged libel had had the effect of closing a house in which such infamy was practised—that the witnesses had been purposely scattered by the complainant to prevent prejudice to his own case—that it was easily to be proved, and would be proved before that charge was disposed of, that the receipts at the house had never been higher than they were at the time at which the doors of the house were closed—and so-forth and so-forth. And so "Godiva"

ran, and the law's delays kept the libel case hanging on, and the great gulf of poverty came nearer and nearer, and no man guessed it, except the man who was plunging into it, and who saw no way to avoid it.

The fame Tom Carroll got out of the proceedings in the libel case was not of the sort after which he thirsted, and when the actual trial of the case came on he was subjected to great discomforts. Bowder, Q. C., was engaged for the other side, and made it extremely unpleasant for the complainant.

"Now, Mr. Carroll," said Bowder, Q. C., hitching his gown at him when he got him in the box, "I believe you are a man of spotless moral character."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, who was cooler than he had expected to be.

"Pray don't accept that as my conclusion, Mr. Carroll," said Bowder, who could be facetious. "I may entertain a different opinion."

Now this seemed a little unwarrantably insolent, and Tom let out a facer in return.

"Naturally," he said. "You are paid to entertain a different opinion."

"I will leave you, sir," said the notable criminal barrister, with an air of injured dignity, "I will leave you, sir, to reflect upon the good taste of that observation at your leisure. But now, Mr. Carroll, the standpoint you take is that you come into court to prefer this charge as a man of spotless moral character? Come. That is so, I fancy?"

"The standpoint I take is that the article complained of is false and scandalous," said Tom.

"And that you are a man of spotless moral character?"

"That is a claim few men might care to prefer," said Tom.

"You don't care to put it forward in your own case?" asked Bowder, Q. C.

"Do you?" returned the complainant.

The case was interesting, and the court was full. There were two or three barristers present who had nothing on their hands, and who knew Mr. Bowder and his ways. The defendant's counter-query tickled these gentlemen so that they led the court on to laughter, and for half a second the notable barrister was disconcerted. But this game of fence was old to him, and he knew better than to lose his temper.

"You mistake the situation, Mr. Carroll," he said, with suave humour. "It is you who are under cross-examination, and not I. Perhaps we may be allowed to put the matter in this way: Without actually being a man of spotless moral character, you like to be thought so."

"Kindly proceed to your examination, if you please," answered the complainant. "You can't mend a bad case by intellectual horseplay."

"You remind me of my duty to my clients," said Bowder, still suavely humorous, though a certain wickedness underlay the suavity. "I am obliged to you. Did you ever stand in the dock of a police-court, Mr. Carroll?"

"Never."

"Upon your oath?"

"Upon my oath."

Mr. Bowder's attendant satellite pulled him by the gown, and whispered. Bowder stooped to listen, and arose smiling.

"At least, Mr. Carroll, you have been in the hands of the police?"

"I have," said Tom, quietly.

"And this is not your first appearance in a court of justice?"

"No."

"I think you did not make the other appearance to which I allude as a witness, but as a prisoner?"

"I appeared as the defendant in a case of assault."

"Don't you think you might have been a little more ingenuous at first, Mr. Carroll?" asked the able Bowder. "You did not appear in the dock? Where did you appear?"

"I had a seat in the body of the court," Tom answered, feeling anything but comfortable. The apparent quibble in his answer troubled him. "Perhaps the court will allow me to explain. I have no desire to evade this examination. A categorical question was put to me, and I answered it; but I have no wish to fence about trifles."

"You think a charge of wanton and unprovoked assault a trifle, Mr. Carroll?" asked Bowder. No man at the bar (and this is one of the blots upon our legal system which can scarcely be

scraped away) is expected to be fair to an adverse witness.

"Permit me," said the complainant, "to throw myself upon your merciful consideration." This he said satirically, and it was well enough, but before it was fairly spoken he lost his temper for a second or two, and added, "I neither said nor meant that, sir, and you know it." He was not accustomed to be badgered in this way, and it cost him all he knew to restrain his anger. Anger gave him no advantage, and, recognising that fact, he prepared to control himself anew.

"Very well, Mr. Carroll," said the barrister, jauntily. "We will come to matters of fact. You have been in the hands of the police, and you have appeared before a magistrate. Was the charge against you dismissed?"

"It was held to be proved," Tom answered, "and I was fined twenty pounds."

"I am obliged to you for your candour, Mr. Carroll," said the Q. C., benevolently malicious. "You were fined twenty pounds. And do you read the newspapers?"

"Occasionally," Tom answered, seeing what was coming.

"Are you acquainted with a publication called 'The Mirror'?"

"I know that there is such a journal."

"You know that there is such a journal. Now since you are in a candid mood for the moment you may, perhaps, admit that you saw an article in that journal relating to yourself. I can assist you if your memory fails you. It appeared on

the day following your appearance at the police-court. Did you see it?"

"I saw it."

"I believe it spoke of your rowdy and disgraceful conduct?"

"It condemned me in the strongest terms. I cannot call its terms to mind."

"It condemned you in the strongest terms. Thank you. Do you happen to remember that it spoke of the leniency of the Bench as having probably been extorted by your wealth and social position."

"I remember that."

"And that it expressed very strongly an opinion that your offence would more fittingly have been punished by imprisonment than by fine."

"I remember that also."

"I presume, Mr. Carroll, that you expected these questions?"

"I expected them. Certainly."

"And that the prospect did not encourage you to pose as a man of spotless moral character?"

Cold silence.

"Well, Mr. Carroll," pursued the practised tormentor, "that is a point upon which you are naturally sensitive, and upon which I will not press you." The people in the court thought this amusing and laughed at it. "But now, sir, will you be so obliging as to tell us what domestic event followed upon your appearance at the police-court."

"Be more explicit, if you please."

"I believe you maintain your innocence of that charge of which we have just spoken."

"Emphatically."

"Do your friends accept your disclaimer? Is it, or is it not, a fact that your father instantly cast you off, and that he still refuses to speak to you?"

"It is true that I am not on terms of friendship with my father."

"And is it true that the breach arose out of your rowdy and disgraceful conduct?"

"That is certainly untrue."

"That it arose out of the assault and battery upon the person of Mr. Moss?"

"It arose chiefly, as I believe," Tom answered, "from my father's anger at the publicity that case had received."

"Did he decline to receive your account of the case?"

"Unhappily, he did?"

"I can sympathise with your regret," said Bowder, and this time the laughter was hearty. It was not the fault of the laughers that they could not know how lofty and tender was the nature which was thus wrung and tortured. "Now I will ask you another question, if you please, Mr. Carroll. I see by the public advertisements that Mr. Bethesda is the nominal lessee of the Garrick theatre. Who is the real lessee?"

"I am the actual lessee."

"And Mr. Bethesda, persistently announced as the lessee, 'the sole lessee,' never was the lessee at all?"

"Quite so."

"Does a representation of that sort fit with your notions of spotless honour, Mr. Carroll?"

"It is a common practice," Tom answered.

"And a most convenient one, no doubt," said Bowder, in a sort of virtuous triumph over vice exposed. "I will not detain you much longer, sir. The taking of the theatre was a purely commercial speculation?"

"Not purely commercial."

"Not purely commercial?" cried Bowder. "You have been kind enough to admit so much that, by-and-by, you may oblige us by admitting everything. What other element——"

"I took the Garrick Theatre chiefly for the purpose of laying my own work before the public."

"And as a commercial speculation?"

"And," Tom answered, "as a commercial speculation."

"Now, will you be good enough to tell us whether it has ever succeeded as a commercial speculation?"

"It has not succeeded."

"Have you, or have you not, lost money from the first?"

"I have lost money from the first."

"Is it, or is it not, a fact within your knowledge that the house will not hold enough to pay the working expenses?"

"That fact was brought to my knowledge shortly after the opening of the theatre."

"And you held on to your precious commercial speculation?"

"I had reasons for continuing it."

"We shall get at them by-and-by," said Bowder. Then followed a long series of questions about

Miss This and Miss That, to every one of which Tom could give a direct and honest negative. Beat about as he would, Bowder could fasten no admission on him here, but the young fellow already stood dangerously prejudiced. The judge knew how to estimate a good deal of what had gone on already, but the jury and some of the listeners thought the nominal lesseeship of Bethesda and the reckless financing of the house looked as black against the complainant as his admissions about the assault and the "Mirror."

But many of the performers in "Godiva" were people of repute, and they came up one after another to give a blank denial to the allegations of the libel. Nothing Bowder, Q. C., could do could shake these witnesses, and to any candid mind it was as clear as day that the morality of the Garrick was a little higher than that of most theatres, instead of being a great deal lower. In his address to the jury, Bowder, Q. C., was very crushing with the complainant. "You saw, gentlemen, how he shuffled and equivocated and prevaricated in that box before you." Bowder was so indignant at this that the jury really thought they had seen it, and shared the eminent pleader's indignation at it. Then the great man was mightily sarcastic over the commercial speculation, and having already dragged the real figures out of Bethesda, he demanded to know if any man in whom there dwelt one scintilla of intelligence was asked to believe that there was not some sinister purpose behind a profusion so prodigal as that of the complainant. But he was at his best in dealing

with the assault case. Here he rose to heights of moral indignation so sublime, and drew pictures of the wreck of domestic hopes in the Carroll family so touching, that the jury were ready to acquit the defendants on the spot. The judge set all this right, however, as he generally can do, and the intelligent dozen of men gradually sobered under the judicial shower of fact and reason. On the evening of the third day of the trial they retired, and, after considering for some half-hour, brought in a verdict of Guilty against the Editor and Publisher. The judge, with a necessary word or two about the liberty of the Press and the sanctity of private character, sentenced the pair to twelve months apiece, and the great libel case was at an end, and Tom Carroll's character had had the black so rubbed into it that nothing could get it altogether clear again. People knew very well that where there is smoke there is fire, and very few thought Tom well out of the case.

It is an old aphorism that you have only to throw plenty of mud to make sure of it sticking, and a good deal of the mud which had been thrown at Tom seemed still to the public eye to hold fast to him below his legal whitewashing. The case came as a sort of godsend to the newspapers, which happened otherwise to be dull that week, and it was reported at great length, a special staff being employed by each of the leading journals. There was not a man in England whose affairs were more relentlessly canvassed whilst the trial lasted and for a few days afterwards.

Now all this was gall and wormwood to

Mary Lording, who heard a great deal more about it than Tom himself. Ladies found a curious fascination in the case, and spoke with a shuddering joy of that horrid Mr. Carroll whom they used to think so nice and who had turned out to be so very, very dreadful. Some spoke in ignorance, and some in spite, and some in condolence, and the girl bore it, since it had to be borne. She refused absolutely and entirely to believe one word of evil against the man she had known from his boyhood and her own infancy, and had never known anything but a gentleman. She scorned and hated the calumnies which surrounded him, and she scorned and hated those who believed in them. She was not Tom's lover, but she was his honest friend and staunch partisan. And she would have been his lover too, with all these troubles behind him to push him into her arms, if it had not been for her own heart's memories of Baretti.

As for Tom, his position was extremely difficult. He was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the promises he had made to himself were unfulfilled. He felt himself soiled by the infamies which had been brought so near him, and, innocent as he was, he felt vile in his own eyes when he thought of Mary. How could a pure-minded woman bear to think of associating herself for life with a man who had been the centre of such a story?

This sort of exaggerated fineness of sentiment, as everybody knows, can have the edge taken off it by close and constant intercourse, but Tom stayed away from Lording's house, and gave him-

self no chance. His growing poverty gave him a more genuine reason for absence than his morbid delicacy provided, and everything he had to do at this time seemed to proclaim him a failure.

When the trial was over the last reason for keeping up the run of the opera at the Garrick had disappeared. The people knew he was a failure, and that he had thrown away five or six thousand pounds in the attempt to make himself look like a success.

"Advertise the last six nights, Bethesda," he said, to his manager.

"There are no arrangements for anything to follow?" said Bethesda, half questioningly.

"No," said Tom. "I think I have had about enough of theatrical enterprise. Do you think we can relet the house?"

"I should say there is every chance of it," said Bethesda. "Every chance."

"Very well," said Tom. "Send out the posters 'Last six nights of the enormous musical failure, "Godiva."' I shall be glad to have done with it."

Mr. Bethesda, looking after the retreating figure of his patron smiled humility and benevolence.

"He can afford it, poor young gentleman," said Mr. Bethesda, inwardly. "It's a pity, but the blow is not likely to prove fatal to him. I have not done badly in his company, though I expected to do better. A young gentleman with a good deal of money and no knowledge of business is sometimes a very awkward sort of customer to deal with, but Mr. Carroll has been a pearl among employers."

Since Tom would not call on Lording, the old fellow called on Tom, without any decided idea of what he meant to say to him. He began to talk about the finish of the trial, and after expressing his exultation at the punishment which had been inflicted upon the libellers, he found Tom so irresponsive that it was difficult to go on.

"Tom," said the old boy, suddenly, "treat me fairly. Tell me about your plans. What are you going to do?"

"I shall do as best I can, sir," Tom answered. "I can make a living, I dare say."

"Make a living?" cried Lording, savagely. "Why the devil don't you behave like a sensible fellow?"

Tom knew what his companion meant, but he returned no answer. He was all but bankrupt, and the whole world knew of the failure which had so long been bolstered up by money, and blazoned as a success in all the journals. And though he had gained his case against the scandal which had assailed him, he knew very well that there were scores of people who thought him soiled by it. It was in Lording's mind that Tom ought somehow to be penitent and ashamed of himself and generally docile, and, in fact, the two men were, in a word, at once depressed and irritable.

"I'm not going to throw myself at the head of any man who doesn't want me," said Lording. "I've stuck by you all the time, and I'd stick by you now if you'd let me. But since you won't,

I'm going. When you come to your senses, I shall be glad to see you."

"Very well, sir," said Tom, sadly and bitterly. There was no open quarrel, for there was no ground for an open quarrel between them, but Lording rose and went his way. It was not his fault, he told himself. He was not the man to desert another in extremity. But he could go no further than he had gone, and it was shameful to keep on throwing his daughter at the head of a man who would not take her. But he was not happy, and he felt as if, after all, he had acted shabbily. This is not a sentiment calculated to improve the temper, and by the time he reached home he was in a state of hot wrath against himself and Tom. Mary saw his disturbance and asked its cause.

"I've been trying to bring that young fool to reason," he said, rather unfairly. "He's like a bear with a sore head. I can't get a word out of him, and I'm not going to fling my child at the head of any man who doesn't choose to take her."

"Papa," said the girl, bending over him and caressing him, "remember how tried he has been and how unfortunate."

She felt that she, at least, should be true to him in spite of everything, and she went away to write a hopeful letter to him. If only it had been possible to make him happy without marrying him. She tried to write the hopeful letter, and the words that came to her pen were on one sheet so icy and on another so over warm that she could make nothing of the task, and after a dozen efforts gave it up. If she could

have written "I love you, and if you leave me you will break my heart," the whole thing would naturally have ended and determined then and there. But she could not write it truly, and she could not bring herself to feign it. And all the time her heart was more with Baretti than with Tom, and she had her own unhappiness, and the best of human hearts are selfish in misery.

The letter went unwritten. She would leave it to events to untangle themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT a fortnight after the closing of the Garrick Theatre Azubah Moore received an amazing statement from her teacher of singing. For the future his terms would be multiplied by eight.

"But surely," she said, "that is a very extraordinary increase."

"As a matter of fact," said the teacher, "it is not an increase at all. I ask for no more than I have always received—for no more than the payment of my ordinary terms."

She answered that she did not understand, and her look of bewilderment was too natural to be feigned.

"The difference," he said, "has hitherto been paid, but I cannot reckon upon it any longer."

"Has been paid?" she asked, in angry amazement. "By whom?"

"By Mr. Carroll," returned the teacher.

"By Mr. Carroll?" she repeated. She could scarcely be angry at that, for it was to him that she and her father and mother had consented to owe everything. In spite of the daily papers, she was ignorant of the great libel case, and she knew nothing of Tom's losses, or of that family quarrel which had been public all the world over.

"By Mr. Carroll," said the teacher again. "I had supposed you knew of it; but it was no concern of mine. But now, Miss Moore, that Mr. Carroll is no longer in a position to keep up his share of the payments, I must ask for a revision of our contract, or——" He made a motion with his hands as if he tossed something away.

"Mr. Carroll is no longer in a position to pay you?" asked the girl. She was not thinking of herself at all. "What has happened?"

"I'm afraid," said the teacher, "that he is ruined. Haven't you seen the papers? Mr. Carroll has been a good deal before the public lately."

She could only answer, "Ruined!" The thing seemed incredible.

"I'm afraid so," said the teacher. "If you like, Miss Moore, to enter into an arrangement with me to make over a share of your professional earnings for the first two years, I shall think it worth while to superintend your studies without present payment, and even to devote to you some special care and attention. Otherwise I shall be compelled to ask for my ordinary terms."

She heard this, but had no understanding for it.

"Can you tell me," she asked, "how Mr. Carroll was ruined?"

"He seems to have lost a good deal of money on his theatrical enterprise, and to have quarrelled with his father. I know no more about it; but he is said to be completely broken. Will you think over my proposal, Miss Moore, and give me your conclusions on it?"

"Will you write to me?" she answered. "I cannot tell you what I may do."

He promised, and she left him and walked away, feeling quite dazed and staggered. She was but a girl, with a very limited knowledge of the world and its chances of rise and fall. It seemed as amazing to be told that Mr. Carroll was ruined as it would be to the average citizen to learn for certain that the Prince Wales was reduced to the shelter of the workhouse in his native parish. He had always seemed so far above distress, so bright, so gay, so grand a seignor altogether, that he had been like the creature of another sphere to her. And now he "was said to be completely broken." What might that mean? Shabbily dressed, ill-shod, ill-lodged, ill-fed? Forlorn and sad visaged, and in grief? She could picture him thus to herself, wild as the vision seemed.

She was country-bred and a staunch walker, and now, having her usual musical hour to spare, she went on foot, thinking all the way. Latterly, since her father's accident, she had been accustomed to act and think for herself, and it was not in her mind as yet to tell anybody of the change in her own fortunes which Tom Carroll's fall had brought

about. That indeed troubled her very little by comparison with his misfortunes. She was so full of him that when she reached home and found him sitting, genial and unchanged, in the shop which he himself had provided as a resource for the family, she had scarcely the presence of mind to greet him with a mere good-day and a shake of the hand.

He was sitting at the counter talking to Mrs. Moore, with a glass of milk and one of the crisp little dairy loaves before him.

"What excellent bread you have, to be sure, Mrs. Moore," he said, smilingly, "and what charming country milk. You ought to do a great trade here."

"We're doing wonderful, thank God, sir," answered Mrs. Moore, in a flutter of pleasure. "And I don't think as if Moore only had his health, poor thing, sir, we should ever ha' been better off in our lives."

"I'm heartily glad to hear it," he answered, munching away at the bread and sipping at the milk. "Beautiful bread this is, to be sure. And what a sauce an appetite is, Mrs. Moore, I haven't had a meal of bread and milk since I was quite a baby."

"No, sir, I suppose not," said Mrs. Moore.

The girl stood by with her roll of music in her hands and watched him. Unchanged? No. That had seemed true in the first revulsion of reality from the dreadful fancies she had had of him; but now she could see the trace of trouble on his brow and his eyes. He was very pale, too, and

when he was silent a look of suffering would settle upon his face. In a little while he arose and went away with a hearty shake-hands for each of them.

"I can't stay until Moore awakes, Mrs. Moore; but you'll give my respects, and tell him I called, won't you?"

Azubah ran upstairs and watched him furtively from her own window as he went down the street, swinging his cane in a fashion which looked gay and light-hearted enough, if it had not been for her memory of those new lines upon his face and the look of trouble in his eyes. Whilst she watched him his cane ceased to swing, his gait changed, he seemed somehow to droop in his walk, and as he turned out of sight the poise of his head, and indeed the attitude of his whole figure, looked not only thoughtful but despondent.

Azubah was one of those who act upon impulse, and who analyse the impulse afterwards or not at all. What impulse moved her when she ran downstairs and followed Tom Carroll she would have been puzzled to say, then or afterwards. It was certainly not curiosity. There was sympathy in it; but sympathy was not all. She had fluttered out into the streets, and, turning the corner Tom had turned before her, had caught sight of the retreating figure before any questions of her own purpose arose in her mind. Then she awoke on a sudden to a shamefaced feeling of obtrusive impertinence, and retreated with both cheeks on fire, but not before she had observed anew the drooping, melancholy gait into which Tom Carroll had

fallen, a gait which expressed despondency and irresolution as plainly as the words on a printed page.

There are prodigious numbers of people in the world who have learned almost all they know of human nature from novels and the stage. In life a man is not under the necessity of making his emotions understood by the denizens of a distant gallery, and nature plays more subtly than art; so subtly that it is only one in a possible ten thousand of spectators who may guess at what this sign or that expresses. To walk four or five miles through daylight London is to be exposed to the glances of many thousands, and yet—unless you purposely publish them—to keep your own emotions secret. It is probable that nobody but Azubah saw more than a meditative slowness in Tom's walk that afternoon; but she read, or seemed to read, something very like despair in it.

She thought of him sadly that afternoon and evening. Nobody could tell into what depths of poverty she and her father and mother might have fallen if it had not been for his kindness, and now he himself was in distress. They could pay him back by-and-by what he had lent them; but she knew enough of their differing spheres to tell that the sum which had made her father and mother fairly prosperous would be of little service to him. There are country gentlemen in England richer than the owner of Trench House; but she had not been bred to think so, and she exaggerated Tom's fall because she exaggerated his former splendours. Yet they must strain every nerve to

repay him now, little as it would be to him, and she herself owed him a private debt which she would be quit of in one way or another. The splendid, generous, kingly youngster, heir-apparent to the throne of Overhill, the lightest hearted, freest handed, and most friendly among men, and now "said to be completely broken." The girl's tender and unworldly heart filled with a dangerous pity.

She dreamed in her broken sleep that night that he was in rags and starving, and she brooded unhappily over the dream next day. And sitting next morning in the little room behind the shop, still brooding over an idle needle, she saw the object of her thoughts enter at the doorway, and, being alone for the moment, she was forced to go in and meet him.

"Good morning, Miss Moore," he said, with something of an embarrassed air, which she could read plainly enough, but was at a loss to account for. "I have business in this part of London just now, and I am becoming quite a frequent visitor. How is your father to-day?"

"He will be glad to see you," said Azubah. "Will you come in and see him?"

Tom assented, and the girl led the way. The old farmer with his wasted face and keen eyes sat in an arm-chair smoking.

"Go and look after the shop, Zubah," he said, when he and Tom had shaken hands. "Mr. Carroll will take care of me for a minute or two." The girl obeyed. "And so, Mr. Thomas," said Moore, when she had gone, "our Christian friend has cleaned you out, has he?"

This query rather staggered the visitor, and for half a minute he returned no answer.

"It was my own fault entirely, Moore," he said, at last. "If by our Christian friend you mean Bethesda——"

"I mean Bethesda," said Moore, nodding.

"I think he acted very fairly and honestly all along."

"Very likely," said the farmer, "very likely. Spilt milk, Mr. Thomas, is a foolish thing to cry over. I'm a dairyman now and that proverb seems appropriate. But I was never sorrier for anything than I was to read that story in the papers. Neither Zubah nor the Missis ever look at the papers, so far as I know; but I tore the leaf out and used it bit by bit for pipe lights, lest they should see it. It wasn't pretty reading, for a young woman in particular."

"No," Tom concurred. "It wasn't pretty reading."

"I've heard say, Mr. Thomas," said the farmer "as your mother left you eight thousand pound. Now, if what the papers reported is true—I haven't seen our Christian friend lately, and so I haven't had a chance to ask him about it—if what the papers reported is true, there isn't a great deal of it left."

"No," said Tom; "there isn't much of it left, Moore. There is very little of it left."

"And you've split with the old Squire?" Tom returned no answer. "It isn't pleasant to talk about it, Mr. Thomas," pursued the farmer, "and I'm not

talking out of idle curiosity. You've split with the old Squire?"

"My father and I have quarrelled," said Tom.

"Well, that's no wonder," returned the other. "And what are you going to do? You haven't been brought up to do anything."

It was not easy for Tom Carroll to say that he was hawking musical manuscripts from door to door of the London publishers. He tried to answer lightly.

"I will tell you my plans by-and-by. I have no fears about myself. I have a living at the ends of my fingers, Moore."

"And the old Squire's taken up with Mr. Mark, has he?" said the farmer. "I can manage to hold a pen by this time, and when I read that case in the papers I wrote to Wilkins and asked him to send me a line or two about the business. He tells me Mr. Mark prophecies everywhere that you'll come to your own again, and says he's nothing but a warming-pan."

"Yes," said Tom; "Mark has been sanguine all along."

"I'll bet he has," returned Moore, with a dry laugh. Tom looked at him inquiringly. Here again there was an evident suspicion of Mark.

"What do you mean by that, Moore?"

"Mean?" said the farmer, in his crackling voice. "That he *has* been sanguine all along. What the dickens else should he be? He was as poor as a church mouse before the Squire took to him, and now it looks as if he'd come in for a pretty penny. Sanguine? I should think he was."

"Then you don't believe that my cousin Mark is doing his best to bring about a reconciliation between my father and myself?" asked Tom. There had been a time, not long ago, when he would have scorned to speak of these things or to listen to them; but that time had gone by, and his childlike trust in all men had been sorely shaken.

"I never set up to be a Solomon," said the farmer; "but I should never have been such a fool as to believe that of Mr. Mark, Mr. Thomas. About you, now, I might have believed it; for you're one of those saints by nature that the world calls fools, and you'd wait an hour in the rain any day to help the lame dog that bit you over a stile. But Mr. Mark? No, no. That's too ridiculous."

"Well," said Tom, with a dreary look, "there are a good many millions of men in the world who have to make their living, and if I am to be one of them I scarcely think it a misfortune. And, whatever my cousin Mark is doing now, he had nothing to do with the quarrel between my father and me."

"Mr. Thomas," said the farmer, seriously, leaning forward as far as his damaged back would allow him, and tapping his visitor's hand with the waxed end of his long pipe. "Take my tip, sir. Don't rely on a word Mr. Mark may say for you. It will never be said. I've known him since he was that high, and I've reckoned him up pretty completely. I shouldn't wonder if he'd set that nasty story abroad about you. He's the only man in the world, it seems to me, who has to gain by damaging you, and it comes natural to suspect him."

"Either," said Tom, "my cousin Mark is the most patent rascal in the world, or he and I are targets for the whole world's scandal. But I have learned my lesson, Moore. I have been too much maligned myself to be ready to listen to scandal about other people."

"Very well," said the farmer. "If Mr. Mark's a true man I'll eat him. I've known him man and boy this five and twenty years. He's too honest and open and above-board for my taste, is Mr. Mark, sir. You've been a true friend to me and mine. Let me do you a good turn. Leave off trusting Mr. Mark. Play on your own hand. The old Squire's a bit hard, and as up-stuck as a hop-pole; but he's as honest as the day. If he guessed Mr. Mark's game as I do, he'd be off with him in an hour."

"Where's the motive?" cried Tom. "Why should he want to injure me? I am out of his way already."

"But you ain't beyond calling back again into his way," said Moore, "and he means to drive you."

It was sufficiently unnatural if it were true, and yet in one way it was natural enough. Tom's heart was tuned to suspicion by Baretti, and if he really began to suspect he felt that he would be dangerous. It is not easy for any man to hold possession of himself when he has been robbed of love, good fame, and fortune; and the youngster was not the Tom Carroll of old days.

"Say no more," he said, waving his hand against the farmer. "I can't afford to believe it. If I knew for certain that your suspicions were

true, I couldn't trust myself. And I am ill-tempered and vile-hearted enough to believe them. Give me a glass of milk, Moore, there's a good fellow, and I'll get back home."

"Strike that gong on the table, sir," said the farmer, and, Tom obeying this injunction, Azubah came into the room.

"Do you want anything, father?"

"Mr. Thomas would like a glass of milk, my dear," said the farmer.

"And, Miss Moore," said Tom, "if you wouldn't mind taking the trouble to bring me one of those crisp little rolls, I should be much obliged. I think there's something unusual in the air down here that gives one a most extraordinary appetite."

He was so poor a pretender, and so unused to lying even in the mildest way, that he boggled over this simple sentence, and the farmer looked at him with more than his common keenness. First he glanced at his fingers and looked at the rings there, and next his gaze went to the visitor's watch-chain.

"Be so good as to tell me the time, Mr. Thomas," he said, when the girl had gone. Tom drew out a handsome watch and answered him. The farmer laboriously set his own to the time indicated, and Azubah returned with the roll and the milk. Her father made a faint and scarcely perceptible motion with his head and those supernaturally bright eyes of his. She caught the gesture and retired again. "Mr. Thomas," he said, when they were once more alone, "I'm ashamed to ask you, after all the favours you've done me, but can

you make it convenient to lend me a five-pound note until to-morrow. I'll post it first thing in the morning without fail."

"I'm very sorry," said Tom; "I haven't got it with me. I can send you one this evening."

"Never mind, sir, thank you," said the farmer, "It's not a pressing thing. I must wait until to-morrow."

"No, no," said Tom; "you shall have it."

"It's very good of you, Mr. Thomas," returned the farmer, falling back in his arm-chair with a singular air of relief. "It's only a matter of four and twenty hours with me at the outside. The shop's doing splendidly, and I don't know that ever we were better off than we are now. We shall be paying our debt to you, Mr. Thomas, almost directly."

"Thank you," said Tom. "Make it convenient to yourself, Moore."

"Take another roll, sir," said the farmer. "It's a goodish step up to your part of the town, and I reckon it's an hour or two from your dinner-hour yet, isn't it? You can easy spoil your dinner by going too long without it."

"Thanks," said Tom; "I'll take another. What charming butter you have here. And the bread is excellent."

"Hunger's a fine sauce, Mr. Thomas," said the farmer, and, looking keenly at his guest, he saw a disconcerted look upon his face, and half a blush that overspread its pallor. Tom called for his second roll, and despatched it together

with another glass of milk; and the two were silent.

"I'll go now, Moore," he said, rising, and whisking away imaginary crumbs with his silk handkerchief. "I have business to do. You shall have that to-night. I'll send a commissionaire with it."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Thomas," said the other, shaking the proffered hand. His eyes lost the keenness which had commonly belonged to them since his disaster, and their shrewd suspicion melted almost into tears. "God bless you!" he said, as he dropped Tom's hand. "I don't believe a better man ever broke bread."

Tom laughed uneasily, and with a farewell wave of the hand was gone. The farmer sat with bent head for a minute or two, and then, suddenly smiting the table with his clenched hand, he half rose in his chair and fell back in a spasm of pain.

"No good to anybody," he muttered. "If I'd got ten thousand pounds I'd give a thousand of it to be able to follow him and put the other nine thousand in his hands. The pride of the place! The pride of the place! As handsome a lad as you'll see in a summer's day, and as good as you'll find in a year's journey!"

Tom Carroll walked so slowly from South London to West London that it was dark long before his arrival there. He went irresolutely, and lingered at one or two corners, looking about him with a furtive air which became him ill indeed. Once or twice he seemed to form a sudden resolve, and hurried on decidedly; but his step slackened again, and again he lingered at corners, or stared

in at a jeweller's shop windows. At last he went hurriedly into a by-street, and almost ran through a darkened doorway, cannoning against an ill-dressed, slatterly woman who bore a large parcel in her arms.

For two or three minutes a figure had dogged him at a little distance. It waited now in the shadow of the by-street, and when he emerged from the darkened doorway followed him. He was like a man who had committed a crime and feared detection, glancing suspiciously right and left as he went; but he never looked behind, and never saw the shadow in his rear. At his own doorway the shadow caught him and laid a hand upon him.

"Oh!" he said, starting as he turned. "Is that you, Baretti?"

"Yes," said Baretti; "it is I."

Tom began to talk of nothings as they walked upstairs, but Baretti spoke not a word until the two turned into Tom's sitting-room. There he silently lit the gas and closed the door, and then turned upon his friend. Tom, looking at him, saw that his face was grey and that his eyes were full of tears.

"Carroll," said the little man, with a shaky, husky voice, "it was here in this room—that I told you all my troubles, and you relieved them. You were rich and prosperous, and I was poor and broken. We were not quite friends in those days—almost strangers; and you were angry that I had not spoken of my troubles sooner. And now, when you saved my life, and gave me hope again and made a man of me, and we are brothers in heart and soul—you can be poor, and can let me

be rich and prosperous and never speak a word. Is it friendly, Carroll? Is it just to me? Ah, Carroll, you love your pride better than you love your friend!"

"Why, Baretti, old fellow," cried Tom, lamely, "what's all this about?"

"You do not care for me," said the painter, "or you would not pretend like this, Carroll." He paused for an instant, and advancing, took Tom's hands in both his. "I have been behind you this last half-hour. You have come to your last pound, and you have found my old miserable refuge. No, no, no! Why should you be ashaamed or angry that I know it?"

Tom walked doggedly into the next room, and the little man followed him. His voice was altogether broken when he spoke again.

"It is unjust, Carroll! it is unjust." Tom stretched out a reluctant hand towards him backwards, and Baretti clasped it.

"Don't make me break down, old fellow," the youngster said, with a half-hysterical laugh. "I've been through a good deal of worry lately, but I should like to keep a stiff upper lip through it all."

But two slight meals of bread and milk in four days do not furnish the best diet in the world for a man's nerves to be steady on under pressure of this sort, and, with Baretti's tears upon his hand, the hapless lad turned, and casting his free arm upon the mantelshelf, dropped his head upon it and cried outright. And bitterly as his own tears shamed him, there was no shame in them, for it was not his unhappiness that made them flow,

nor any cowardly pity for himself, but the sacred hand of sympathy that broke their fountain's stubborn seal.

CHAPTER V.

IN his native county Tom Carroll had by this time something of a Bluebeard reputation, and he became an almost proverbial illustration of what a young man might become by laying himself out to be wicked. To have cleared himself publicly of the charge publicly brought against him went for nothing. Young Mr. Carroll's conduct, it was generally admitted, must have been a terrible blow to his father, and a great deal of sympathy was expended on the elder Carroll's woes. Mark's chastened grief over his cousin's fall from the heights of virtue was noticeable and worthy of notice, and the mild hopes Mark nourished for Tom's final reformation were supported to do credit to his better nature.

The soil of human intelligence would seem to favour the growth of fallacies, but to be virtuous is not necessarily to be happy, and to be wicked is not necessarily to be unhappy. Conscience, popularly supposed to be a sentry, is so untrustworthy that he will go to sleep on guard unless you watch him keenly; so that he is most active (like other troublesome functionaries) when least needed. To speak of conscience assailing some men accept in deathbed fear or like cases is to talk nonsense. It has long been a cant of criticism

that this or that villain of fiction is made credible by humanising touches, and we are told that there are no men who have not some redeeming virtue. Shakespeare thought otherwise, and drew one or two wholesale villains who had no good points about them, but he had no concern with humanitarian crotchets, and was satisfied to paint men as he saw them. It is a far cry from the intellectual and social level of Iago to that of Bill Sikes, but higher than either, and lower than either, and in all the countless grades between, there are men who share their spirit.

It is not in the least to be supposed that Mark Carroll was unhappy because he was a very finished rascal. If he bit the kind hand that had often fed him, he knew all about gratitude and had exercised it so long as it had been useful to him, and his conscience (if he had a conscience) approved his action. If he lied for his own advancement, he did it cleverly, and his lies passed for truth, and success was satisfying. To have been a stupid scoundrel would have been criminal, but to be a clever one carried credit with it, and not blame. It was the shameless saying of a great man that a blunder was worse than a crime. Mark carried that creed further, and in his philosophy the only possible crime was a blunder.

He lived in clover at Trench House—was flush of money and had crowds of friends. In the house Tom's name was never mentioned, but outside he heard it often, and his attitude towards his cousin was always beautiful.

"No, no, no," Mark would say when people

expressed their sentiments about Tom. "Even the General Enemy is admitted to be less black than he's painted. And, hang it all! people talk as if a young fellow never kicked over the traces before. And, come now, I put it to you—Don't you think that Tom came out of that libel case very well, all things considered? I'll tell you what it is. Taking it altogether, I think my cousin Tom has been confoundedly ill-used. Lots of fellows have done the same thing in hot youth, and have settled down into respectable church-going citizens afterwards; and the chances are ten thousand to one that Tom will do it, if he only gets the chance, poor fellow. But just because he's run a bit wild everybody's down on him like a hammer, and I'm sorry for him—downright sorry, by gad, I am!"

It is a curious provision of nature which fits every animal to his surroundings. The arctic bear grows white, the grasshopper is of the colour of the field, fish take the tint of their river bottom, and a persistent liar comes to believe in himself.

It may be noticed that Mark's conversational style had adapted itself or been adapted to that *rôle* of genial allowance which he played. Without actually sinking to the level of unsuspecting stupidity it had fallen from its habitual height of cynical cleverness, and there was a something half bucolic in his very manner. Of course he knew at bottom exactly what a pretender he was, but he had reached the persistent liar's bourne of vague belief for all that, and had touches of indignation and pity when he pretended to have them. Without something of the imaginative and self-projective

power of an actor or a poet it is impossible to be a good liar. The simulation of the emotions awakens—not precisely the emotions themselves, perhaps, but—an artistic, thin reflex of them, and this it was which glowed in the bosom of cousin Mark, and gave his speeches an air of reality when he talked of Tom. But when Mr. Irving leaves the stage, though he has probably suffered all the woes of the Prince of Denmark, and has broken “the recorders” with some approach to real passion, he has no grudge against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and nurses no special brotherly affection for Horatio. The woes, so keenly felt that you and I have thrilled at them, are packed away with the wardrobe of the tragic prince, and the great actor sups—if he takes supper—and blissfully forgets them all.

Mark used to watch within himself the workings of this singular natural process, and used to extract amusement and philosophical edification from it; but to be unhappy about his own conduct, so long as it prospered, never entered his mind.

But whilst he went on in growing ease of mind and constant comfort there was trouble brewing for him in a quarter he had forgotten to think about. The charming Signora was once more out of employment.

It was characteristic of the Signora that she felt Mark's desertion less bitterly and hated him less intensely for it when she was prosperous than whilst she was poor. As a matter of fact, thousands of women have committed murder on

precisely the Signora's provocation, and there were many times when she felt murderous: times at which she would actually have put an end to Mark if he had been in her way. At these moments she would not have paused to think of results, but she thought about them afterwards, when the fit of rage had passed, and told herself philosophically that the game was not worth the candle. Only—if she could but catch him on the hip—if she could but see her way to a vengeance that would not be too dangerous to herself——His violent death at her hands would leave a ghost behind, and that would be too much to dare.

The Garrick was closed, and no new opening declared itself. Whilst her engagement had lasted she had a little more money than she needed, and what was over and above her wants she saved. For a week or two she made applications hopefully, whenever she saw a chance, and then for a week or two despondingly. She was fast sliding back into that condition from which Tom Carroll had rescued her; and all her hope deferred, and all the rebuffs she met, and all the misery she dreaded, went naturally to swell Mark's account and to feed the flame of her hatred for him. If anything had occurred to make her independent of the world, she would still have gone on hating him, but less fiercely. She might in a year or two have sunk into a mere contempt for him; but care coming, and hunger looking near, she set them all down to him, and her hate burned hotly against him.

She had invested a good deal of her small

salary in what Mr. Wemmick called "portable property," and now she began to find her way to the pawnbroker's, poor thing!

If we reserved all our pity for those who are pleasant and good, we should have to restrict our sympathies terribly.

In these straits, and before she reached them, she had often thought of applying to Mr. Bethesda, who might, for all she knew, be ready to start, or preparing to start, another theatrical enterprise. But she did not like Mr. Bethesda. She had not been bred to be a squeamish woman, but she had—as everybody has—her own moral code, and Mr. Bethesda fell short of it. She had had experience of Mr. Bethesda behind the scenes, and that good man's affections for the sex at large had sickened her. Beggars, however, cannot be choosers, and at last she sought the residence of the late manager of the Garrick. That gentleman's influence with the Brethren had altogether fallen away from a variety of causes, amongst them being the establishment of a Bible class for ladies of the ballet. No man can escape calumny, and the Brethren had cut Mr. Bethesda from their communion.

The Signora walked all the way from her lodgings to Mr. Bethesda's house, and rang the good man's bell. The good man himself answered to her summons and gave her a fatherly welcome. He had a rare eye for a good-looking woman, and his tastes were catholic.

"Tell me, sare," said the Signora, "is ze Garrick again to be open?"

"I can't say," returned Mr. Bethesda. "If I

could find the money I should like to take the house myself. You are looking for an engagement, my dear?"

"I am looking for engagement," said the Signora.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Bethesda, smiling and fatherlike, "a handsome young lady like you should find that very easy."

"It is not easy," said the Signora, smiling also. "Can you tell me where to go?" If *one* had any hope of getting anything from Mr. Bethesda, *she* knew better than to try to get it by wearing a sad face in his presence.

"Pray sit down," said Mr. Bethesda, "and let us talk things over." He placed a chair for the Signora and set another at the side of it. She took her seat and he took his. "It is to be regretted," he said, "that Mr. Carroll's enterprise at the Garrick broke down so soon." He took the Signora's unresisting hand. "Much to be regretted."

"Very much," said the Signora, in her pretty foreign English.

"But poor Mr. Carroll," continued Bethesda, slowly and distinctly, so that the lady should understand him and not get tired of his gossip too quickly, "was very extravagant, and is quite ruined, I am sorry to say."

"Poor young man," said the lady, her fingers itching to smack Mr. Bethesda's smile.

"Poor young man, indeed," said Mr. Bethesda. "I suppose you knew him very well?" The Signora shook her head. "No?" asked Bethesda,

smiling again. "You came to the theatre like an old friend."

"I knew him," said the Signora, "a leetle. Very leetle. I had seen him two zree times."

"Was that all, indeed?" asked the late manager, still holding her hand and bending forward as he spoke. "May I ask where you saw him—how you came to know him?"

"He came to my husband's house," said the Signora. "My husband was the great tenor, Signor Malfi. He would come to my husband's house with Mr. Marco Carroll. Do you know Mr. Marco?"

The Signora was the picture of innocence. She was apparently unaware of Mr. Bethesda's possession of her hand, or it might have been an everyday thing to talk in that attitude; and her mention of Mark was made in the most indifferent manner in the world, though she was aware of a little inward tremor as she made it. The tremor in degree was not unlike that a maiden experiences when she thinks of her lover in love's early days. In kind it bore a resemblance, for extremes meet, and hate and love are not always perfect opposites.

"Slightly," said Bethesda, edging his chair a little nearer. "Poor Mr. Carroll's fortune has all fallen into Mr. Márk's hands."

"Ah!" said the Signora. "How!"

Mr. Bethesda related what he knew, and in the course of his narrative got his chair nearer still and set an arm about the Signora's waist. The lady, anxious to hear all, made no objection

to his overtures, though her fingers tingled more than ever.

"And is Mr. Mark," she said, catching at the English form of the name with difficulty. "Is Mr. Mark a very good young man?" Bethesda had just told her for what Tom had been dismissed by his father.

"I believe," said Bethesda, "that Mr. Mark is a very good young man indeed. Mr. Mark is quite a guileless person, so I am informed."

"And is Mr. Carroll so very good also?" asked the Signora.

"Oh," said Bethesda, smilingly, "Mr. Carroll is quite a stern, unappeasable, Roman-father sort of person." The Signora did not understand all this, but she caught the tone, and nodded with an answering smile. Bethesda, who was in quite a lover-like posture by this time, thought the smile an odd one, and felt disconcerted by it.

"And," said the Signora, still smiling, "if Mr. Carroll heard bad things of Mr. Mark he would send him away also?"

"I should think so," said Bethesda.

"Oh, dear me," said the Signora, in her pretty foreign manner. "What a hard work to be for ever so good young man. Where does he live, this good young man. The old one, is he very rich?"

"Very!" said Bethesda.

"Where does he live?" asked the Signora, again.

Mr. Bethesda told her what he knew, and made tender play with his hands in the meantime, squeezing the Signora's hand and waist. She

might have been a lay figure, she took all this so quietly; but when he had spoken she arose and disengaged herself.

"I shall go now," she said. "If you hear of anyzing, will you let me know, sare?"

Mr. Bethesda, protesting that he would, advanced with the obvious intention of kissing the Signora. Her previous acquiescence in the good man's tender approaches might have encouraged one much more bashful than Bethesda, and it was a surprise to him when, as he smilingly proffered his salute, the Signora slapped his face. It was not the encouraging sort of box on the ear with which some ladies beckon on their lovers, but laid on with a quick and heavy hand. The wooer was so staggered by it, mentally, and for a few seconds his head rang so, that he let the lady go without a word in answer to her cool "Good-day."

When he followed the Signora was already in the street, she smiled and nodded at him across her shoulder, and went her way, leaving the good man in a state of some depression and bewilderment. She, on the other hand, wore an expression altogether different from that with which she had approached Mr. Bethesda's house. Her head was erect, her step elastic, her eyes smiled, and there was a fine glow of colour on her southern cheek. For she saw clear before her what she had longed for now for many and many a weary day, and she marched to it as a hungry man walks to a well-furnished table. If the elder Carroll had dismissed his only son on grounds so slight, he would be scarcely likely to have mercy on a

nephew against whom she could prove so much. She would go down and denounce Mark and rejoice in his ruin. It would be cheaper than killing him (that was altogether too fearful a joy for her to snatch at—she had thought of it too long), and it would be a vengeance more complete and lasting. With all her hunger of hate for Mark she had a sense of justice too. To her mind, naturally enough, Mark was the greatest villain in the world, and she could conceive of nothing worthy to be matched with his perfidy. The Signora was a simple-minded person, and did not bother herself with intellectual subtleties of any sort, or she might have called to mind the fact that if anybody else had suffered by it she would have thought Mark's perfidy a trifle. But your toothache is always worse (to you) than mine; and I am never so persuaded of the solemnity of the problem presented for solution by the criminal classes as I am when I discover that my pocket has been picked. That which is nearest touches us most, and our own affairs are generally closer to us than those of other people.

It never occurred to her how easily Mark might turn her attack, or how hard it might be to get into places in which her denunciation of him would serve her turn. She walked on full of hate and hope, thinking of her monetary resources and planning to sell this and the other lately acquired bit of finery, to make a purse for the journey. Beyond her revenge her thoughts did not carry her, and this alone might have seemed to make her dangerous if Mark had known of it. For

without one conscious thought about the matter she was burning her boats, and if Mark could parry the one attack she had in mind that momentary success would make things worse for him.

The Signora's walk had given her an appetite, which she was disposed to fight for economy's sake. She was dreadfully thirsty also, and the sight of a dairy shop, exquisitely clean and neat in its arrangements, was pleasant to her. A glass of milk would at once assuage thirst and fortify her system, whilst it would only cost a penny. So the Signora entered, and found herself face to face with Azubah Moore, who was tranquilly stitching away with a book in her lap behind the white-scoured counter, with its clean glasses and glittering measures.

"My dear!" said the Signora, in pleased amazement, "how do you do?"

Azubah, with no very exuberant professions of delight, arose and shook hands with her. The Signora began to question and to chatter in her foreign lively way, and liquid foreign English. Had Azubah taken a place here? Had she determined to sing no more? How had she been doing, and what had she been doing since the Signora had last seen her? Azubah answered quietly that this was her father's shop, that she was studying music, and that she was very well indeed. The Italian woman got her glass of milk, and sat down at the counter to talk. She had tried to befriend Azubah, and that for one thing made her feel friendly; and in the time of

her beginning of distress Azubah had been sympathetic. Altogether the Signora was delighted at this encounter, and for the moment she forgot her hatred, and her heart rested. She chatted about her troubles, and told how poor she had been when she obtained an engagement at the Garrick, and how kindly the lessee had behaved to her. It was natural that she should be pleased to boast an acquaintance with the lessee, whom she had known in her better days before Tito went mad and mistrusted her.

"He is ruin, now," said the Signora, "and I am sorry. He was never wise, but he was good and nice. It was sad for him that he should ever go to the Magatherium that night you sang there."

"Why?" asked Azubah.

The whole truth, or very nearly the whole truth came out. The Signora had told the tale pretty often already to her fellow chorus-singers at the Garrick since the beginning of the libel proceedings, and the renewed allusion to the leading article in the "Mirror." But Azubah had never seen the "Mirror," and had never heard a word of Mr. Moss's action for assault until this moment. She had many and many a time thought of Tom Carroll as he had stepped in between that terrible little Hebrew and herself, and had remembered how nobly he had acted. Tom himself had never been proud of having thrown Mr. Moss downstairs, but Azubah had looked on the deed with reverent admiration, and had never dreamed that such awful consequences could grow out of it. She began to feel as if she personally

were responsible for the ruin which had fallen upon Tom Carroll, and so much worship and gratitude and pity filled her heart that it felt like to break. She clasped her hands and cried out more than half unconsciously—

“Mr. Mark was there! Oh, why couldn’t he tell his uncle how it happened? He would know everything.”

“Ah, my dear,” said the Signora, nodding her head three or four times, “Mr. Mark is going to have the fortune. He will do anything but harm to his cousin.”

“Oh, I am sure you are wrong,” cried the girl. “I have known him since I was quite a little child.”

“I have known him, too,” said the Signora. “I know many things of him. He is bad man, my dear. There is no man more bad in England. I know. I know.”

“How do you know?” asked Azubah. “How can you know?”

“My business!” said the Signora, smiling. “I know.” She nodded her head again, two or three times, in a curiously threatening way, which the girl was altogether at a loss to understand. “He is very happy now, Mistare Mark. Very well. Wait. A week. Not more than a week.”

With this she laid a penny upon the counter, which the girl pushed back again. The Signora was not above economy at this time, and returned the coin to her purse with another nod and a strange smile. She kissed Mary across the counter, and said “Goodbye,” and walked off towards her

vengeance. When you love or hate, the whole world is naturally full of the object of your thoughts, and it did not at all surprise her to find two people on one day who made Mark the theme of their talk.

Azubah, sitting with idle hands from which her work had fallen, thought over the revelation the Signora had brought her. Unstinted admiration and profound pity were in her heart, and when a girl begins to lavish these two upon a young man, it is easy to guess on what road she is travelling. Azubah had not far to travel, but she was a stranger to the road, and did not recognise the bourne that lay before her.

CHAPTER VI.

MOORE received the five-pound note he had asked for and sent back another in exchange for it. It soothed him to get it, for he had guessed the truth about Tom's financial position, and now he was sure that his guesses had been mistaken, or had, at least, flown further than the mark.

Tom, of course, if he had had the choice, would rather have died than have broken down as he did in Baretti's presence, but his breakdown did him good after all. Lording seemed fairly estranged now. Mary sent him no message of hope; he was ruined and everybody knew it; he had even got bread this last two days by a subterfuge of which—though it was not very shameful—he was ashamed. Bethesda found a

curious difficulty in realising the properties at the Garrick, which might at least have staved off starvation for a month or two. They had cost two or three thousand pounds, and were worth something still, and the unexpired lease of the theatre was supposed to be worth a thousand, yet he could not touch a penny piece. But it was Baretti's friendship, and not these things, grievous as they were, which broke the youngster's self-restraint and gave him the blessed relief of tears.

He was less ashamed of himself than he would have been if he had cried in the presence of an Englishman, and Baretti saw nothing shameful in the whole matter, but wiped his own eyes unaffectedly, and without any attempt at the disguise of his emotions. Tom pushed him from the room, and being alone, pulled himself together and cleared away the traces of his tears. Then, with a guilty air, half hang-dog and half defiant, he rejoined the little Italian and began to smoke moodily.

"Carroll," said the painter, "let us talk of your affairs." Tom puffed away with an expression almost sullen. "You will finish opera number two?"

"I don't know," said Tom, "I think I shall go and fiddle in the streets. I suppose one could make a living that way, if it is worth while making a living at all. I'm not quite sure that it is."

"My troubles were less than yours," said Baretti, "but it was you who taught me how to live them down. You will teach yourself the same lesson. You are too proud to let any man say

that you gave up the fight because it went against you."

Tom smoked on and gave no sign of having heard this, but it was put in just the right way to touch him, and when Baretti had kept silence for a minute or two the young fellow rose and shook himself.

"Nobody shall say I threw up the sponge," he said, doggedly. "No, I'll fight till I go under, for good and all."

"I know that," said Baretti. "It is your nature. You cannot help fighting in such a case. Let us lay the plan of the campaign. In the first place, Carroll," the painter rose to say this, and, with his old gesture, laid both hands on his friend's shoulders and looked up into his face, his own lambent eyes agleam with affection and appeal—"In the first place, Carroll, there is to be no more of to-night's work as long as there is a pound at the bank belonging to either of us."

"I can't be dependent upon you, Baretti," returned Tom.

"No," said Baretti, "you love your pride better than you love me. Between friends there is no giving and taking—everything is in common. Understand, Carroll. Whatever is mine is yours, and if you do not take it at your need we are not friends any longer, and you are a humbug and a pretender and no true man and honest gentleman. If you refuse me I swear to heaven I will draw every penny I have and throw it in the Thames, and never speak to you again."

Tom laughed at this singular resolution, in a forced and unreal way, but he took the two hands Baretti stretched out and shook them both.

"Very well," he said, "we won't put you to such extremities as that. I can make a living and there is something to come out of the fire yet. And perhaps in the end even my father may come to reason."

"He will never come to reason whilst your cousin Mark is at Trench House," said Baretti. "I speak in kindness, Carroll. Cherish no delusive hopes. In the pursuit of art there is a future before you, but you must not demoralise yourself by fancies which are doomed beforehand to disappointment. Mark is your enemy, Carroll."

"Don't talk of my cousin Markin that way," said Tom. "I am getting a little tired of these charges against my cousin Mark. I never knew an honester fellow in my life, and I've suffered something from scandal on my own side, and I won't listen to it."

"Well," said Baretti, "there are plenty of assurances of Mark's friendship in his own handwriting in that writing-desk of yours, and you have come to a time when you may very fairly try them. Then suppose you see your cousin Mark and put him to the test. He will not part with a penny for your sake."

"I shan't ask him," said Tom, shortly.

"At the bottom of your heart you know him as well as I do," cried Baretti.

"A little better," Tom answered.

"You dare not ask him," said the painter,

with his hands abroad. "You dread lest he should prove a villain."

"I know perfectly well," said Tom, "that he would prove nothing of the sort."

"He knows of your losses by the newspapers," said Baretti, declaiming indignantly, "and does he write from the home he usurps to offer you a helping hand? Why does he pretend to be advancing your cause?" he demanded with a sudden coldness of voice, and eyes half closed. "Because he is plotting behind your back, and wishes not to be suspected. Who set that libel about? Who but your cousin Mark? Carroll—I am indignant at your infatuation."

"Baretti," said Tom, moved by several contradictory emotions which he did not care just then to analyse, "I will disprove this foolish charge of yours, before I begin to be ass enough to believe in it. I will go down and see Mark and tell him what a hole I am in, and you shall see how he will act." After all Tom would rather borrow of Mark, with whom he had been like a brother all his life, than even of Baretti, and Mark in point of fact owed him a good few hundreds, and would only be repaying a little out of his abundance. That was one reflection. Another, which was in flat contradiction to it, was that he would like to be sure of cousin Mark, and in a certain case to have it out with him, and yet another was that he had it in his power to clear Mark's character from an aspersion even viler than any that had been cast upon his own.

He sat down and wrote a brief note to Mark,

telling him that two days later he would be at the King's Arms Hotel in the county town, and would be greatly obliged if Mark would meet him there. There could surely be no shame in asking Mark, to whom he had lent so much, to restore a little of it, and yet the impracticable, unpractical young man blushed as he wrote, and had more than half a mind to throw the note into the fire. Wishing it unwritten, and feeling sore with himself for having at last taken up Baretti's challenge, he walked out with the painter and dropped his letter into a postal pillar, and then returning, pencilled a few lines to Moore, enclosed the promised five pounds with them in an envelope, found a commissioner, despatched him, and went to supper.

He thought it curious, now that he had money to sup elsewhere, that he could find the heart to order the meal at home again. He had paid two months' rent in advance to oblige his landlady long ago, and always kept in advance afterwards—after his own business fashion, which was to pay everybody twice over if possible—and he had not felt afraid to occupy the rooms for a week or two, but he had not been able to find courage to order so much as a breakfast since his pockets were emptied. But now he began to be a little hopeful again. Mark would let him have fifty pounds at least, and he would make that last him for three or four months by dint of strict economy. In the meantime Bethesda could be pricked into action, and the theatrical properties and the lease must go at a sacrifice. Then he would be out of harm's way, and could at least dine every afternoon,

whilst he wrote opera number two, or took to playing at concerts, or gave lessons, or prepared to hold body and soul together in some way. It did not seem very well worth while to hold body and soul together under the conditions, apart from the fighting instinct in him.

On the following evening he took train to the county town, and got as far as Birmingham without adventure. At the railway station there an odd thing happened, for he ran full against Signor Malfi, who was walking along the platform at a great pace talking volubly in his native language to a bearded friend. Tom's wonder at his presence there was dissipated by the sight of a placard on which was blazoned in red and black letters the words "Theatre Royal. Italian Opera." Beyond a doubt the Signor was there in professional capacity. The Englishman looked absently after him, and noticed something peculiar in his gait—a swift, sidelong motion of the body, and a certain set carriage of the head—as if the Signor were anxious for what he was saying to be heard, and at the same time anxious to keep an eye on some person ahead. The bearded man got into the train, Malfi shook hands with him at the window, and Tom forgot all about them. His own affairs were enough for him to think about just then.

He passed a restless night, and on the morrow he got up and awaited Mark. Mark did not appear, having other fish to fry at this juncture.

The village of Overhill was a little startled and surprised by the sudden appearance in its

midst of a nameless young woman, gorgeously apparelled and of evident foreign extraction. She did not seem to know anybody in the place, and did not seem to have any business there. So far as she spoke English at all, she spoke it fluently (though accent and idiom were alike foreign enough to be remarkable in so small a place as Overhill), but the speech of the natives seemed altogether incomprehensible to her. The people at the inn had at first been inclined to refuse her sleeping room, for she had no luggage, but she had smilingly set down a sovereign as guarantee for her own good intentions.

The foreign lady discovered that Trench House was the residence of Mr. Carroll. She ascertained also, in spite of the conversational difficulties which beset her, that Mr. Carroll's nephew, Mr. Mark, was at this time staying at Overhill, and she manifested a good deal of interest in the house and grounds. On the evening of her arrival she entered the private grounds of Trench House—the lodge-gates being open and unguarded—and sat for half an hour on a rustic bench which commanded a view of the illuminated windows of the dining-room. There were two people at table, an elderly man and a young one, and a butler, rather sturdier and broader-shouldered than his tribe commonly are, stood at the sideboard, or occasionally moved about the room in the discharge of his functions. So far as the foreign young person could observe, the younger man was exceeding deferential to the elder. When she had sat out her half-hour or thereabouts, she arose and walked back down the gravel

drive, and through the lodge-gates, still unnoticed, and returned to the village inn.

Naturally, all her points were canvassed that evening in the bar-room, and the station-master, who happened to be present, contributed to the discussion the fact that a bearded person who spoke imperfect English had arrived by the same train, had watched the foreign lady into the little omnibus of the inn with obvious interest, had despatched a curiously worded telegram, and after lingering on the station platform for a couple of hours had gone back again without the transaction of any business whatever. The telegram had been written in Italian, and had contained three words only—"She is here." The station-master, making a shot at the meaning of the first word, supposed the lady's name to be Ella, but declined on professional grounds to reveal the nature of the message. He was pretty sure, however, that the bearded person's sole business was to watch the lady and to see where she alighted. He was the more confirmed in this belief by the fact that the bearded person had arrived at Overhill without a ticket from the county town, and had paid the fare on arrival.

Not to be unbearably mysterious, the foreign lady was no other than the charming Signora, and the bearded person was actually a friend of Malfi's engaged in the same company, but out of the cast for that particular day.

When Signor Malfi got down to Birmingham he knew vaguely that he was nearer Mr. Mark Carroll's abiding place than he had been when

in London. Hate is just as good as love for keeping the object of it before the mind's eye, and there scarcely passed an hour in which Signor Malfi did not think of Mark Carroll. It did him good, however, and greatly soothed him to believe that Caterina could be trusted to pay off the score which had been raised by her own infidelity. His supposed propinquity to Mark's abiding place brought Mark into mind more than ever, and a sudden sight of the Signora on a railway platform had given him a new and terrible notion. The Signora looked prosperous, yet had no baggage with her, as she would have had had she been far from home. She was smiling when he had seen her, and had seemed in quite a festal humour, and the Signor's idea was that she and Mark were simply under shelter together somewhere in the neighbourhood. If that were so he had been more than commonly well fooled, and he was disposed to be more than commonly hurt by the fancy. Caterina's threats against Mark had sounded real enough, and he had believed in them. It might have been reasonable to believe in them now, and to suppose that the fair Signora was on the way to execute them, but Malfi's mind was poisoned by jealousy, and he was not in the mood to think of what was or was not reasonable.

He received his friend's message and he panted to be able to follow. It never crossed him to think that Caterina had gone down for vengeance. It only occurred to him that he had been doubly and trebly fooled. He looked forward with a shaky, terrible delight to the hour

when he would be able to get away from the duties which held him and denounce and curse them both. His programme went no further. But though he was on pleasure bent, he had a frugal mind, and he did not care to risk the loss of his engagement. He stayed out the morning rehearsal, therefore, and being out of the cast for the evening, he took the mid-day train for Overhill.

Mark got Tom's letter, and laughed over it to himself. He put a ten-pound note in his purse, and arranged to split his little all with his cousin. Mr. Carroll the elder had opened a banking account for him and treated him in all respects as he had treated Tom aforetime, but Mark did not see his way to a mention of that circumstance. He told his uncle that he was going into town to see after a gun which had suffered some trifling mishap and had been repaired.

"I am in need of exercise," said Mr. Carroll the elder. "I will walk with you to the railway station."

Mark bustled about in an affectionate, half-reverential *bonhomie*, and got the elder man's hat and walking stick. Mr. Carroll the elder liked that sort of service, and was pleased; but Mark took it as a matter of course to open doors for him and the like, as if he had been a marquis of the old *régime* and Mark a sort of privileged upper servant.

The two set out together, and it hit Mark like a hammer to see the Signora walking calmly along the one street of the village as if she had

lived in the place all her life. She smiled when she saw Mark and recognised him by a mere drooping of her eyelids, which she made to act in place of a nod. The ready gentleman was for the space of one heart-beat as white as marble, and for the space of another or so he blushed like the red, red rose. His foot tripped, once only, and he walked on as calm to outward appearance as before. The lady saw these signs and smiled again. She was going to crush him and ruin him, but she was not so poor an amateur in revenge as to do it all at once. She followed him slowly and at ease, accommodating her pace to the solemn, ponderous, and somewhat gouty step of the elder gentleman. She recognised him also, and she had noticed anew the deferential character of Mark's manner towards him. She either read in the elder's face or translated into it out of her own hopes a certain inflexible, dogmatic look, which argued well for her scheme, she thought. So she walked behind her victim, well pleased, and he glancing round casually saw her smile and cursed her, and went on talking in his own charming way for his uncle's pleasure.

It befell that Mr. Carroll found himself a little fatigued before much more than half the walk to the railway station was accomplished. It had been at his own command and expense that the line was carried so far from Trench House, and he was willing to suffer for it, but to-day he had no need to go so far. When he parted from Mark he passed the Signora, and for all his grandeur

and stateliness he could not avoid looking at her once, for curiosity, and once for a curious, extorted kind of admiration. She quite realised the elder Carroll's idea of a fine woman, and when he had fairly passed he arranged his gold-rimmed eye-glasses and turned for another glance at her. It discomfited him curiously to find that she had turned to look at him and that Mark had at the same moment turned to look at her. What business had Mark to look at strange and foreign young women? He walked with added dignity after this.

Mark rejoiced that his uncle had left him, because he had now a free field in which to tackle this young woman. What did she want? To extort money? Or to ruin an old and faithless lover? Or was she here by some curious chance and not by intention? He resolved to know, and that right early.

When he was persuaded that Mr. Carroll was fully out of sight he took a divergent course and strolled through a field or two. Then, lighting a cigar, he sat down upon a stile and awaited the Signora's coming. To his immense disgust she passed the first stile over which he had climbed, giving him a sweeping curtsey as she went.

"Damn the woman," said Mark. "She thinks I am afraid of her, and wants to play cat and mouse does she? Very well, my lady. I suppose I'd better have it over."

He arose and walked briskly back into the road, and there was the Signora placidly strolling

ahead of him. He followed, and came up with her easily. The road was quite clear and there was no great fear of being observed in her company.

"My charming Caterina," he said in her own language, as he came to her. "It is a pleasant surprise to see you here."

"Is it not?" she asked him, without turning her head.

"It is, indeed."

"I am so glad to please you," said the Signora, smiling. "You know that I made you a promise quite a long time ago. I am here to keep it. I have heard what a very good man your uncle is. I have heard that he is so very good that he could not even tolerate the poor, stupid innocent your cousin. I am here to tell him what a good young man *you* are, and to help to fix you in your place, dear friend."

"Thank you, my Caterina," said Mark suavely. "Shall I tell you something you do not guess?"

"If you please," said Caterina, smiling still.

"You are the cast-off mistress of my cousin, and your object here is to extort money from me by threats. The first policeman we meet will see you out of the village to oblige me, and to avoid scandal he will do it quietly."

She stood still in the road to look at him, and there was no vestige of her late smile in her eyes.

"You see, Caterina," said Mark, "that it is scarcely worth while to play with me."

"I suppose," she said, quietly, and in a sort

of wonder at him, "that you have told lies about your cousin all along."

"Assuredly," said Mark. "I shall tell lies about you if you make it necessary, and I shall be believed. That is the way of the world. Your injured innocence remains uncredited, poor Caterina, and my practised villany once more succeeds."

"Marco," said the Signora, "you misunderstand. I told you that I was dangerous. You do not know how dangerous I am."

It was only within the last minute or two that she herself had begun to guess that.

"My good child," said Mark, "I am not in the least afraid of you, and I am not likely to be. I thought it well to see you at once and have the thing over. You sang in my cousin's theatre, and everybody down here is willing to believe anything of him. I am very sorry that he has sunk so low as to send you here to extort money from me for his own necessities, but if I am forced to say so I shall say so, and there is an end. I shall be believed. Nobody will understand what you try to say in answer, and if they did understand you, nobody would believe you."

She felt foiled and desperate. There was a diabolical reason in this cool villany which staggered her. Why should people believe her? And how should they understand her?

"Marco," she said, quickening her pace to keep up with him, for he had begun to walk on as if the conference had ended, "Marco, you will drive me to kill you if I cannot be revenged in another way. Take your choice."

"If you are not gone in two hours," said Mark, tranquilly, "I shall report your threats to the police and shall order your removal. Silly child. I don't want to hurt you, but I won't have you in my way."

She walked on after him downcast and lowering in look.

"I cannot go away," she said, after a while, in a tone which seemed to Mark's ears to admit that she was vanquished, "I have not money enough to go back with."

"Well, as for that," said Mark, "I am not so hard that I will not help you." He thought of the ten pound note in his purse, but Mark never liked to part with money, and there was a partial claim upon that already. "You may stay till evening. A train leaves at eight o'clock. Do you see that little copse? Do you see the white road across the fields, which leads from it to the railway station? Meet me there—near the great tree at the edge—do you see it?—and I will give you enough to carry you back. For once I will deal mercifully with you, but if you come again I will do that which will make you sorry till you die. Good day, Caterina."

He walked on slowly, and she turned as if broken, and when he looked after her she was crawling along dispiritedly with hanging head. Had he known her thoughts he would have been less satisfied.

For all his outer coolness he had been so absorbed in speech with her that he had neither seen nor heard the departure of the train, though

the warning bell and whistle had sounded clearly, and the train had gone smoking over the winding rails through half a mile of open country.

"Too late, Mr. Mark," said the station-master. "That's a fine lassie yonder, sir, if you'll excuse me saying so. There's nobody down here, though, so it seems, that talks her lingo. I suppose you understand those outlandish tongues, having travelled, sir?"

Mark had been seen there in the act of talking with her. Well, his lie was ready.

"You can hold your tongue, can't you, Leggatt?" he said, looking round in a confidential, secret way. "You've heard of my poor cousin's doings up in town. That's one of the painted trollops that sang at his theatre, and she's down here on the look-out for him, poor beggar. I've promised her a pound or two to go away quietly and not to bother him."

"Poor Mr. Thomas," said the station-master. "He used to seem as good a sort as ever broke bread. He've brought his pigs to a baddish market, now, though, haven't he?"

Mark assented sorrowfully, and walked away. Perhaps it would be as well not to leave Overhill to-day. The signora might recover audacity in his absence. He went back and explained that he had missed the train and he stayed indoors all day.

Tom, meanwhile, waited and waited. There was no answer to his letter, and it appeared as if no notice were to be taken of it. Towards evening his suspicions of cousin Mark began to side with Baretti's, and he incontinently took train to

Overhill. He would make no disturbance there, but he would have the truth out of Mark at least.

As he alighted from the train the station-master saw him and saluted. The village people knew him, of course, and most of them sheered off from him, though one or two hats were raised.

"Can I speak to you just a second, Mr. Thomas?" said the station-master. "I wouldn't be seen up village to-night if I was you, if you'll excuse me, sir. There's that foreign young person, sir, down here, sir, and I gather from Mr. Mark that there'll be a row if she sees you."

CHAPTER VII.

TOM looked with a changeful countenance at the station-master.

"What do you mean by saying that you gather that from my cousin?" he asked after a pause which was remarkable for its length and or the indications of emotion in Tom's face whilst his silence lasted. "Tell me what you gather from my cousin Mark."

"Well, sir," returned the station-master defensively, "I spoke in friendship, sir, and I trust there'll be no ill-will because I dared to mention it. Mr. Mark deposes that the foreign person is looking for you, sir, and he seems to think that if she sees you the fat will be in the fire."

"Why?" asked Tom, briefly.

"Well, sir," said the man, with a laugh, awkward and embarrassed, "that's for you to say."

"I want to understand this, if you please, Leggatt," said Tom, grasping his stout walking-cane with both hands, and speaking with some difficulty and slowness. "What has my cousin told you?"

"Well, sir," returned the station-master, "in round English, he told me nothing that *he* ought to be ashamed of. I don't know about your share in the matter."

"What did he tell you?" asked Tom, again.

"Well, sir," said the man, with a touch of virtuous indignation, "he did say that the young woman was one of the trollops that Overhill's heard too much of. I'm sorry I took the trouble to speak about the matter, sir. She's in the village, if you like to face her."

"It's curious, Leggatt," said Tom, "how easy it seems for everybody to believe evil of a man. I must see this young lady, and find out who she is at least. Tell me one thing. Has——Never mind. Good day, Leggatt."

Tom swung out of the station, and the master watched him as he walked towards the village. The lad was reckless by this time. Mark's desertion of him seemed definite enough, and though Tom could not as yet grasp the details of the new situation, it was plain that his cousin was maligning him, and plain that Baretti's suspicions had all along been well founded. Tom thought of the old days when he had been prosperous, and had stretched out a free hand to Mark. He re-

remembered the countless favours he had done him, and the affection he had always felt for him, and every memory made Mark's villany the blacker.

"I shall kill him if I see him now," he said to himself, and slackening his pace he began to walk indeterminately.

Even at this time the habit of his whole life and the bent of his whole nature asserted themselves, and he began to seek explanations and to cling to excuses for Mark. It was not altogether impossible that Mark's faith in him had been destroyed by the constant rumours about him. Other people had fallen away from him, and Mark and Tom were such old sailing companions. Almost anything seemed more credible than that Mark should have deliberately cut the ties of countless favours, of friendship, and of blood, to leave the cousinly craft adrift. That he should fire into it began to seem hardly believable at all.

"If I find it all true," said Tom to himself, a hundred times. Then he would grasp that stout walking-sick more tightly, and his nerves would tingle, and his cheeks flush and eyes glitter. "Mark's like the rest of them, and can't keep his faith in an old friend against scandal." That reflection was only sorrowful, and carried no rage with it like the other. And sorrowful as it was it had a little comfort in it. You would rather your friend should wrongfully suspect you of evil than that he should deliberately turn traitor.

Now came still evening on, and Tom Carroll was yet walking indeterminately about the fields and lanes. He was half disposed to go back and

leave Mark alone, and half disposed to walk boldly up to the house of his birth and demand to see Mark there and have it out, when chance, which decides for so many of us, decided for him. Cousin Mark heaved in sight, tranquilly smoking a cigar and twirling a walking-cane. Tom rose from the stile on which for the last minute or two he had been sitting, and went forward to meet him. Mark caught sight of him as he rose, and for a second the ready young man's foot lingered on the road, and his swift faculty of invention struck out all round in search for any impromptu weapon of defence.

"My dear fellow," he said, hastening forward, and taking Tom by the hand, "don't you think you're acting somewhat precipitately in coming here?"

"It may turn out that I am a little late rather than a little precipitate," Tom answered. Mark's hand thrown towards him in vigorous welcome had mechanically drawn his own to meet it, but Mark felt no answering pressure to his own honest grip.

"What do you mean, Tom?" he asked. There was a tone of wounded friendship in his voice.

"Let me ask you one or two questions," said Tom, quietly, though his voice shook.

"Willingly, my dear fellow," answered Mark. "Shall we walk the while?"

He put an arm through his cousin's and made a forward step, but Tom stood stock still. Mark permitted no change to reach his face,

though his companion's presence there was more than annoying, and in a moment might be dangerous. They were within twenty yards of the Signora's trysting-place, and within a few minutes of her time.

"I want to ask you, to begin with," said Tom, huskily and slowly, "if you have lost all your faith in the professions of innocence I have made to you?"

"What a question!" said Mark, turning his face upon him in surprise. "Good God, my dear fellow, No. A thousand times No."

He made another movement to step forward and again Tom stood immobile and irresponsible.

"You believe," said Tom, speaking more huskily than before, and withdrawing his arm from Mark's so that he might stand squarely in front of him. "You believe now, as you have always professed to believe, that I have been maligned?"

"I don't merely believe it, Tom," said Mark, "I know it."

"Then," asked Tom, laying a sudden hand upon the lappel of Mark's coat, "why do you spread the scandals?"

"I spread the scandal?" said the other, with an air of indignant amazement and remonstrance. "What absurdity is this?"

"Leggatt, the station-master," said Tom, with a tightening grip upon Mark's coat, "gathers from my cousin Mark that one of the young women of whom Overhill has heard too much in

connection with my name is down here to look after me."

"Leggatt," said Mark, "is a drunken liar."

"Thank you," said Tom. "Come and tell him so in my presence, Mark."

Mark reached out both hands quietly, and took Tom pretty firmly by the shoulders.

"I shan't do that, Tom."

"Why not?" Tom demanded.

"I can't afford to lose the confidence of the village people." The hand upon the lappel of Mark's coat so far relaxed that Mark by the mere act of sliding his hands from Tom's shoulders to his arms removed it. The two were standing face to face, and were looking in each other's eyes. Tom's face was flushed, and Mark's was white, but the white face was the steadier of the two.

"Do you mean," said Tom, "that you cannot deny it in his presence?"

"Quite right, Tom," answered Mark, entwining his gloved fingers firmly in the sleeves of his cousin's coat. "You have found me out, as there was always a chance of your doing, and things have gone on so well with me that I don't much care. My footing is pretty safe now, and nothing you can say or do can shake me. But if I give one of the villagers the chance to say I am a liar, I pull down my own stronghold." Tom stood quite still, breathing hard and slow, and looked Mark in the eyes. Mark looked back at him and spoke like a victor to an enemy. "It was likely enough that you would have to know

one day or other. You know now, and I suppose we declare open warfare."

Mark's grip on his cousin's sleeve was firm and hard, and he waited with wary eye and every muscle ready. He could guess partly at the rage and wonder and contempt which chased each other in Tom's mind and were faintly mirrored in his face.

"You infamous scoundrel," cried Tom. "You villain." Mark looked at him steadfastly, and Tom, making a backward movement of aversion and disdain, found himself pinioned in his cousin's grasp. "Let me go," he cried. "You infamous hound."

Mark, with his eyes steadfastly fixed on Tom's, released him. There was no threat of immediate personal violence in the manner of the man whom he had wronged, and to Mark that was satisfactory. He knew the emotions to be complex things, and he had expected that Tom would find his chief solace in contempt, or in what he supposed to be contempt—a mental condition founded chiefly—according to Mark's analysis—on hate and envy.

"I begin to know now," said Tom, who might have been the detected villain of the two, he looked so disturbed by contrast with the other. "I have heard you describe yourself often enough. But I never thought that a man could be such a dastard." Mark held him with a glittering eye and kept silent. "You think you have won? You think you are safely seated?" Not a word from Mark, not a sign. Only that persistent, un-

changing, watchful glance, cool and wary and wicked. "An honest man's contempt is too slight a weapon to pierce that callous hide of yours? You hound."

When the blow came Mark was ready for it. Tom's stick lashed out straight at his face, and Mark parried, like the skilful player he was. But Tom's rage, which might have wreaked itself in one stroke, if the one stroke had taken effect, carried him beyond all restraint when he found it intercepted, and casting away his stick he hurled himself bodily upon Mark, and took him by the throat. As quick as lightning Mark crooked him by the heel and fell upon him.

"Don't fight like a wild beast, my good fellow," said Mark, regaining his feet. "I don't want to hurt you, and you can't hurt me. I could kill you in five minutes, and if you have a grain of sense left you know that."

Tom rose a little dazed and staggered. The evening was closing rapidly, but there was still light enough for a man to see to fight by, and he rushed at Mark once more, but only to be met by a crashing smack half on the jaw and half on the neck. This brought him to his hands and knees sick and dizzy and trembling, and for a moment he could not rise.

"You can see," said Mark, "what an infernal fool you are. I don't want to hurt you, but I can't stand still and be mauled, and if you will have it you will have it. I always knew you were a fool," he added, coolly, with air and voice of contemptuous expostulation, "but, hang it all,

can't you see what an ass you're making of yourself now? It's natural enough that you should want to give me a hiding, I dare say; but—— Well, if you will, you will."

Tom was up again and making for him once more. Mark could just see his gleaming eyes in the dusk, and wondered if his own shone so. The whole affair was eminently distasteful no doubt, but he was quite quiet about it. It began to be clear that Tom meant to go on trying as long as he had the power to make an effort, and the conflict, one-sided as it was, promised to last some time. By-and-by there would be the Signora as a witness to it, and that odd sense of fun which Mark owned made him laugh at the fancy that the lady might take the aggressor's side.

"That would import a new interest," said Mark, silently and to himself. Tom saw the laugh in his cousin's face (for Mark faced the waning light) and somehow the sudden deep hatred born of the other's cynicism and villany seemed to cool him. Mark boxed splendidly, and Tom was but a poor opponent for him, though he was not altogether ignorant, and was altogether fearless. There was one idea alone in his mind, he was bent on thrashing Mark. In fine, he was dangerous; for science, though it goes for much, is not everything in an encounter with the weapons of nature, and the clumsiest duffer may "get one in" by chance. Tom came up warily this time, and for a minute or nearly neither had an advantage worth naming. Then Tom landed with that unskilful right of his, delivered in direct

defiance of art and rule, but telling heavily. Mark's counter was smart but ineffective, and Tom, seeing his chance, followed with the left, put in the right again with the whole weight of his body behind it, and stood over the prostrate Mark, somewhat to his own amazement, victor for the moment.

Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just, and it may be admitted that if ever a man had the right to thrash another, Mark had conferred such a right upon his cousin. Mark's confidence was shaken, and as he rose he said to himself, "I may have to take a hiding after all." Tom standing by for the renewal of hostilities, said to *himself*, "I shall win." Mark was no coward, but he did not scorn punishment as Tom did, and that went a long way towards balancing the difference in skill, since the least skilful had begun to prove the doctrine of chances. It was getting dark, too, and that helped to equalise matters. In boxing you want to see your friend's eye, just as you do in fencing, and there is a curious instinct awakened by practice, which tells you exactly which feature the eye has chosen, and you have telegraphed to you with unfailing accuracy the point of time at which the advancing and retiring left will shoot straight from the shoulder. I write for the ignorant. The learned know these things.

Genuine scorn of pain or disfigurement began to tell. The stern yearning for a just revenge was stronger than the mere instinct of self-defence, and Tom's constitutional stamina was greater than his

cousin's. Mark, being knocked clean off his legs for the third time, declined to get up again. He was a young man in whom there was no faculty for shame, and he was getting the worst of it under these unfavourable conditions.

"I have had enough," said Mark.

"I have not," said Tom, grimly. "Stand up."

"I tell you I've had enough," Mark replied, with excusable asperity.

"Stand up," said Tom, again, "or I'll cane the life out of you."

Mark stood up, desperate, and prepared to renew the conflict.

"How long?" he asked. "How long do you mean to carry on this business?"

"Till one of us kills the other," said Tom.

The sincerity of this declaration was undoubtable, and Mark felt a chill as he looked at the prospect. This mild, long-suffering fool of a cousin of his had an animal strain in him after all, and could be stirred up to a real vengeance. Mark began to fight this time with the energy of desperation, but the steel was taken out of him already, and in two or three minutes he was down once more.

"Stand up," Tom, again. Mark made no answer, and Tom, whose foot touched his discarded cane at this moment, stooped and picked up the weapon.

"Fair play," cried Mark, struggling to his feet.

"You mistake the situation, Mark," said Tom, with a bitter coolness which had a passion of rage within it. "This is not a conflict according to the

laws of the prize-ring. It is an execution. Come, sir."

To deal briefly with a subject which can have but little charm to the tender-hearted, Tom Carroll held his hand when the walking-cane broke in pieces, but not before. At first Mark took it fighting, but for the last minute or two he was on his knees, and only the cousinly hand upon his collar kept him from falling in a huddled heap upon the turf. When at length Tom threw away the stump of the cane and released his hold, Mark dropped like a limp towel.

"Now I have had enough," said Tom, not altogether unreasonably.

He found his hat, threw the overcoat he had discarded at the second or third round over his arm, and went away, leaving Mark still coiled up on the turf, moaning, and for the moment half unconscious. When Mark arose he cursed with a subdued intensity which was not unworthy of the situation. He had not merely been royally thrashed, so thrashed that he could scarcely stand or crawl, but he had been thrashed by a man much less able than himself, and the reflection was gall-ing. Still, his sense of the fitness of things was not wholly disturbed. He saw that, from Tom's point of view, the night's work looked natural.

Tom, meanwhile, having discharged his mission, walked towards the railway station. In this world things are so ordered that no joy is permanent, no happiness stable. For the first two or three hundred yards the gladness of battle abode with him, but then a shade of compunction began

to steal over his heart. He told himself that he had deserved all he had got, and more, but he was naturally of a merciful turn, and, except in the heat of passion, could have hurt no human creature, however obnoxious and hateful. The sense of compunction was not strong enough to mount into repentance, but it dashed his vengeful pleasure.

"I have no right to be pleased," said Tom, as he walked. "The work was dirty, though necessary and just; and no man has a right to extract pleasure out of such a business."

Yet he missed the exhilarating glow of revenge accomplished; and, by the time of his arrival at the station, he was depressed and almost miserable. The little first-class waiting-room there had a mirror on the wall, and catching of his own reflection within it he started with surprise. A cut on the forehead, with dry blood barked about it, looked terrible. His nose and upper lip were of abnormal size, his shirt was open at the collar, his necktie was wildly disarranged, and there were two or three buttons missing from his waistcoat. He had scarcely felt his own damages until now; out of sight was out of mind, but he began to be conscious of sundry aches and pains, and he found that he could scarcely raise his right hand to his head. That fact was, of course, traceable to the vigorous employment of the unaccustomed muscles, and was in itself a testimony to the completeness of the castigation inflicted upon cousin Mark.

Tom walked to the station-master's private door, and knocked there.

"Can you let me have a wash, Leggatt?" he demanded, when the man appeared.

"Certainly, sir," said Leggatt, with, polite deference. "Come in, sir."

When Tom walked into the light the man literally jumped.

"God bless my soul, sir," he cried, "you're covered with blood."

"I don't think there's much the matter," said Tom, quietly. "When is the next train?"

"Due in five minutes, sir," said Leggatt, staring at him. "Have you been having a fight, sir, or what? You're awfully knocked about, sir."

"That reminds me," said Tom, with apparent calmness. "When you can find time you had better take the porter with you, and walk up to Marston's Spinney. I think you will find my cousin there. He wants looking after."

The station-master paused in the act of pouring water in a basin, and asked:

"You've had a row with Mr. Mark, sir?"

"Yes," said Tom. "We have quarrelled, and I have given him a thrashing. I think he deserved it. But he wants looking after, I fancy, and perhaps you had better see to it. If any inquiries should be made after me you can say that I have gone straight up to town."

"I hope to God you've done no mischief, sir," said the station-master.

"He will be all right in a week or two," said Tom, calmly. "A little soap, if you please. Thank you."

The station-master, with distracted visage, stood

by whilst the young man washed, and he saw that both hands and the cuffs of his shirt were caked with blood. Tom borrowed a hairbrush when he had washed, and in a minute or two looked half-respectable again. The warning bell rang outside and the two came upon the platform together.

"Goodbye, Leggatt," said Tom, as he stepped into the carriage. It was the last train for the night, and he was the sole passenger from the little Overhill terminus. "There's half a sovereign for you. Look after my cousin, if you please. I think it likely that you will find him just at this end of the Spinney. If not, you may make inquiry about him and see if he has got home."

The engine and its three coaches steamed away, and the station-master was left agape on the platform. A minute or two had elapsed before he spoke to the porter, who was preparing to go home, and bade him get a light. The two went together to the place indicated and searched about until they found a patch of trampled grass, evidently the scene of battle. There had been rain within a few hours, the soft turf had easily torn away, and scores of little patches of bare earth were shown by the light of the lantern.

"Mr. Mark has got up and quitted," said the porter, swinging the light to and fro; "but there's been a pretty tidy conflict by the look of things."

"Hush!" said the station-master. "Listen. What's that?"

There was a heavy groan from near at hand,

and the men, hearing it plainly, stood still and trembled.

"There's been a bad night's work here, I'm afraid," said the chief. "A man ain't battered about in fair fight till he cries like that."

"Here he is," cried the porter, after waving his lantern to and fro again. In another moment they stood above Mark Carroll's prostrate figure. He lay all abroad, with his face upwards, and his chin pointed to the sky. His arms and legs were flung helplessly into the form of the letter X, and at intervals of thirty seconds or thereabouts he groaned terribly. If the two searchers had advanced in silence they must have heard him long ago. Whilst they looked the station-master suddenly dropped upon his knees so that his face came into the circle of light. His shaky forefinger almost touched a something white which stuck out from the breast of the recumbent figure. The porter dropped upon his knees on the other side, and the two glared at each other.

"Stabbed?" gasped one, and the other answered in the same word like a husky echo.

The white object was the ivory handle of a dagger, and the blade was buried in Mark Carroll's body.

"For Heaven's sake," said the porter, "don't touch it. I've heard tell it's certain death, unless you're a doctor. Shall I run for Doctor Morton?"

"No," cried the station-master, rising and recoiling in a single motion. "Stay here. I'll go."

He sped in a shaky horror across the fields, and the porter knelt trembling on the grass,

whilst the wounded man beside him groaned at intervals which felt like hours. After an awful time came lights and voices, and figures moved about the field as if in the uncertain horror of a dream. The doctor came with the little crowd of people who had been summoned to assist, and in a while the wounded man was taken up and borne away in silence or amidst dreadful whispered guesses, and the lights and the frightened faces passed away.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN the charming Signora left Mark she walked back to the village inn and retired to her own room. At first as she walked her drooping gait deceived Mark, and so long as he looked after her it gave him good reason to believe her vanquished. But before long she began to walk swiftly and her form became more upright, whilst the expression of her face underwent a singular and terrible change. At the house door before she entered it she sighted one of the yokels of Overhill, and became conscious of her own aspect. As well as she could she smoothed her features, and as she came near she made a shift to assume a smile, which in spite of the best intentions looked forced and a little ghastly. But the yokel, being a yokel, was not good at the reading of facial expression, and only knew that a remarkably fine woman had gone by smiling. Speaking

about her over his next pint, the loafer observed that she did seem a good-natered un enough, but when she had passed him her features unscrewed themselves unseen and her look was openly terrible once more. She took off her bonnet and smoothed her hair before the little meagre square of mirror on the table by the window, and for a time regarded her reflection steadily, whilst her bosom heaved with a motion at once slow and tempestuous, and her hands were clenched tightly.

In a while she sat down, and for an hour or more she was almost as still as a statue, except for that slow, long-drawn and laboured breath, and an occasional movement of the hands. The fact was that this charming creature was meditating no less a thing than murder, and the deed looked as awful to her as it could look to anybody. Half her soul clamoured for it, and half her soul dreaded it and feared the consequences. Not the consequences which would follow by the penal law, but the slow punishment of her own heart and nerves—the carrying about of a murdered man's ghost with her, in the bright day and the still watches of the night. She knew that her most terrible punishment would be to escape detection, and her thoughts prophesied to her with frightful clearness. She could see herself going about with that shadowy companion (invisible to all eyes but her own), she could see herself tossing through long nights of secret horror with the image of the murdered man standing vaguely against the curtain of the darkness. Her thoughts went further, and she could see the black, shining

reaches of the river, and the gaslamps on either side growing closer and closer as they receded, until they became a fine line of light in the distance, and through the night a woman, driven by a shadowy horror in her rear, and dragged by whispering voices from the stream, walking with reluctant feet towards the refuge of death. She saw these things and they thrilled her with fears, but she knew that neither they nor anything surmountable by hate or cunning would stay her hand a moment.

He had foiled her in a vengeance at once cheaper and more satisfactory than this would be, and he must pay the penalty. Rather than he should win she was ready to dare and suffer anything. She had set her heart upon his ruin, and had made sure of it and gloated over it beforehand. She had held the cup to her own lips and had maddened herself with thirst to drink it until the temptation of the draught was irresistible. Then at the moment when her lips had touched the brim, Mark's hand, stronger and longer in reach than she had fancied, had taken the cup from her grasp and tossed it away. Perhaps had Mark foreseen what was coming, he would rather have been ruined outright at once, but he did not know how desperate her thirst had grown, or what length she would go to slake it.

The time went by as slowly as it travels in a night of fever, when every hour drags itself into insupportable years, and she sat like a monument of patient hate. Through her open window

she could hear the church clock strike the quarters and the hours, after pauses that seemed incredible and these were the only sounds she cared to hear, or took note of, until a voice suddenly struck upon her ear and brought her to her feet.

This voice was a man's, and it spoke a few words of very foreign-sounding English.

"Tito!" she said to herself in a wondering whisper, and stepping like a cat, she advanced and knelt by the open window to listen. He was asking merely for something to eat and drink, but he did it so lamely that the country wits of the landlord were sorely tried to understand him. In one respect at least Signor Malfi was a model of the operatic tenor. He had lived long in many countries and had never mastered any language but his own or tried to master any. In London, Vienna, Brussels, St. Petersburg, New York, or what not, he ate polenta and drank asti spumanti or inferno in an Italian restaurant, and wheresoever he went he had but one theme, the audacity of all other operatic tenors whatsoever in pretending to sing. Even his native vocabulary was limited, and the man was stupid and ignorant and a mountain of egotism.

He had one faculty which in intentness approached the confines of the heroic, and would have passed them had he not been a coward. He could hate. In a bitter, long-lived, slow-burning way his faculty in this direction surpassed that of the Signora, and jealousy heaped coals upon his fire and poured oil upon it. He had followed the Signora to this out-of-the-way place, inspired

by hate of Mark and jealousy of her, and he had learned already that Mark Carroll lived in the village, and had had Trench House pointed out to him. Mark Carroll was not at first recognisable in the village ears as Marco Caroli, but by dint of perseverance the Signor had conquered this obstacle and had learned what he wished to learn. Now murder, if the thing were to be accomplished safely, presented no such terrors to his mind as it did to the Signora's, and it was significant of the quality of his hatred that he could eat and drink even whilst it burned its bitterest within. There was nothing clearer in the whole world to his limited intellect than the certainty that Mark and Caterina were again together, and that her pretence of hatred against Mark had been simply a cunning blind. The Signor, in spite of his presence there, and his hate and jealousy, set an exaggerated value upon his neck, and yet in spite of that he carried a stiletto with him. If a chance should occur—a safe chance—it would be hard to miss it, and aggravating to think of it afterwards. Less than a safe chance he did not feel disposed to take, but he went about (with the usual astonishing ignorance and stupidity of men who contemplate the crime about which he was hovering) to make himself noticeable, and to stamp it on the memories of people that a stranger who could scarce speak English, and who in an English village was remarkable in a hundred ways, had been asking about Mark Carroll.

He sat in the front room of the inn looking on the one street of the village, and there being

really hungry and thirsty he ate bread and cheese, and drank small beer, though he made wry faces over it. Then he tried to question his host, who tried hard to understand him and failed. The Signora, who had her window closed, and her bedroom door open by this time, heard him and understood him well enough. The Signor wished to know whether he was aware of the existence of a foreign young woman in those parts; and the landlord, without in the least understanding him, proposed to answer this question straight and to the point, by bringing down the Signora herself to translate for him. The landlord firmly believed that all foreigners were Frenchmen, and that all foreign tongues were French.

He mounted the stairs and rapped at the Signora's door. At the first sound of his step upon the stair she had silently fixed the latch and retired.

"Excuse me, miss," said he, when she had opened the door again, "there's a Frenchman downstairs, as I can't make a word of. Would you, now, just have the goodness to walk down and pass a word with him?"

The Signora shook her head, and the landlord, having tried in vain to persuade her, retired and rejoined Signor Malfi.

"There is a young ooman upstairs," said he, "as talks your lingo, and can't scarcely speak any other, but she ain't the sort to help nobody, it seems. Theer's Mister Mark, now—Mister Mark Carroll—as have travelled in foreign parts, and maybe he mightn't mind taking the pains to speak

to you, but there's nobody else in the village, onless it's Parson, and him I ain't sure about."

This address passed by the Signor like the idle wind which he regarded not. He did not even catch his enemy's name, for the landlord made it Mark Carl, as nearly as phonography can do him justice.

"Tank you, sare," said the Signor. "Ow moshe?"

This the landlord understood, and answered with his fingers. The Signor, having settled his little bill, lit a cigar, asked for brandy, and having by this time exhausted his English, sat quietly sipping and smoking. The Signora had opened her door again and listened, waiting for him to go. After what seemed a long time he got up and went away with a *buono giorno* to the host. Caterina began to breathe more freely. It was evident that Malfi was hunting her for some purpose of his own, and she was indisposed to lose her one immediate chance of vengeance. She peered at him through the rough curtains of imitation lace, and saw him sauntering down the road. Perhaps he had given up the hunt, with whatever purpose it had been started. She resumed her bonnet and went downstairs to look after him. The freedom of the open air began to invite her, and she had felt half stifled in her chamber. When the Signora walked round the first bend in the straggling village street she waited for a minute only, and then, gathering her mantle about her more closely, walked briskly in the opposite direction to that he had just taken. Once out of the village she made a

detour by the fields, and then began to approach the copse at the end of which Mark had arranged for the evening interview. Reflecting that it would not be wise with such a deed as she had in view to be seen too much in that immediate neighbourhood, she turned back suddenly and discovered the signor at a little distance. She knew at once, as if by instinct, that he had been dogging her steps, and determined to face him at once and to have his business over. Malfi, on his part seeing that she walked to meet him, stood stock still, with his black eyes blazing and his skin a dirtyish olive grey. Her eyes were aflame too, and her bosom heaved faster than common.

"Well," she said, facing him boldly, "what do you want with me?"

"You are like all women," he answered, with all the courage he could summon. "You are a liar and a pretender. But I have found you out at last, and I am bent upon revenge."

"So am I," she answered.

"You blinded me once," he said, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, "but you will blind me no more. I was a fool to believe you, but you acted well."

"You were always a fool, Tito," she said contemptuously, "and you have undergone no change. You are not safe here, for I am desperate, and you will do wisely to go away."

"Not until I have killed him or you," said the Signor Malfi.

The Signora laughed at him, and the Signor did not indeed look especially formidable on the

outside at that moment. His eyes had lost half their fire and he looked hither and thither rather than face her steady glance. The woman frightened him, and he began to wish that he had let her alone, though he found himself compelled to brag and bully a little before he went.

Now the lady herself had been ready enough to threaten Mark before she had meant any real mischief against him, and whilst she was only enraged against him, in a general sort of way. But now the reticence which often accompanies real hate (just as it accompanies the rival passion) stepped in between herself and any proclamation of her intent.

"You!" she said scornfully. "You are too much a coward to kill anybody. Why are you here? Are you jealous of me, you poor fool? What do you want?"

"Blood!" said Tito, with a melodramatic snarl. He had seen a good deal of melodrama in his time, and he knew what ought to be effective on the sort of stage he had most patronised in youth. But he was beginning to feel a want of earnestness in the part he played—the woman's eyes daunted him, and she had altogether the stronger spirit—so that the dramatic monosyllable and the snarl excited nothing but an angry ridicule in the Signora's mind.

She smiled and waved him away, and there was an expression in her smile so terrible that he recoiled a little before the sweeping wave of her hand and arm.

"Go," she said. "I have business to-night,

and I will not have my footsteps followed. If I see you again—I am in a mood to be dangerous—I shall very probably kill you.”

“Go?” he dared to say. “And leave you to meet him?”

“Ape and ass!” she burst out, advancing against him with outstretched hands. “Do I look like a woman on a love errand? Go before I do you a mischief.” She recovered herself from this burst of passion, and turning walked away. After traversing a dozen yards or so, she stopped with this warning—“If you follow me I will kill you.”

The time for her encounter with Mark was growing near, and though she had no great opinion of the Signor’s courage, and believed she had fairly frightened him, there was still a chance that he might follow her. The deed she had set her mind on would endure no witnesses, and for the misleading of a possible spy she marched straight past the place of assignation, along the narrow road which led through the copse, and straight on by the fields until she struck the highway to the north of the village. For a time she had disdained to look about her, fancying that Malfi might still have kept her within sight, but now she prospected and the landscape was clear of him. She was strange to the country, but she had kept her bearings well, and now, breaking through a weak place in the hedge, she began to make her way back to the trysting-place. She had scarce retraced a quarter of a mile when she heard a footstep in the road on the other side of the hedge, and peering through the boughs, she became aware that the Signor

had mustered courage enough to follow. Whether it was at this instant his courage failed him she could not determine, but his steps grew suddenly irresolute and then ceased, so that he stood within five or six yards of her staring at the ground, and after a second's consideration turned on his heel and slowly walked back again. Caterina allowed him to get a start and then followed, keeping to her own side of the hedge, accommodating her pace to his, and walking in stealthy silence.

By and by a hedge barred her way, and she walked along it seeking a place at which it could be got through. The hour of appointment sounded clear and mellow across the fields at this moment. If she were right in her reckoning, she should have been within two or three minutes' walk of the copse, but the height of the mound on which the hedge grew prevented even a glimpse of the country beyond. She found a gap at last and clambered up to it, and there, in the beginning of the twilight, she saw, a single field ahead of her, Tom Carroll sitting upon a stile. She saw him rise and she saw his cousin Mark come forward to meet him. She stood with a branch in either hand and watched. Neither of them cast a glance that way, and she felt safe from any but the closest observation, standing as she did at one side of the gap, with all the body of the flowering hedge between her and the cousins. But all the petty obstacles that came in between her and that draught of vengeance for which her whole soul thirsted set her heart beating and her nerves quivering with the unsatisfied desire of hate. So

she watched and waited with savage impatience, but it was not long before she began to be so interested that even hate was content for a few minutes with watching. She was too far away to hear the words they spoke, but the gestures were eloquent enough to supply her with a clue to the character of the conversation, and she was not in the least surprised when she saw Tom's stick lash out at Mark's face. Then her soul was in her eyes as she watched the combat. More than once she felt inclined to dash out, and by one stroke put an end to it, but when the tide of battle turned and Tom began to win, she rejoiced and withheld herself, and watched, and exulted.

The sole witness of the royal thrashing which terminated the scene between Tom Mark was not aware that she was being watched in turn, but Malfi was staring at her through the boughs of the hedge in the lane. So far as he dared he would find out what she was doing. Once or twice a voice from the fields reached him, and once or twice the sound of blows. His ears were exceptionally quick, and he was almost sure that one of those voices was Mark Carroll's.

He had watched for a long time, and the Signora had stood upon the bank motionless meanwhile. A firm and heavy footstep had sounded on the road and had started him from his watch, but it had faded out of hearing, and when he went back to the break in the hedge Caterina was still standing there. Two or three minutes later she had melted through the boughs against which

she stood (or seemed so to melt, for the evening shades were pretty dense by this time), and after a pause he moved cautiously along on tiptoe until he found a practicable place, and broke silently into the field. Reaching the place on which the Signora had been perched, he peered stealthily over the mound, and in a second or two he made out her figure and the figure of a man in the dusky shadow of the copse.

He strained his eyes, but could make out nothing with surety, but his suspicions helped him to something very like a certain belief in the man's identity. Caterina and the man were talking, but, sharp as his ears were, he could make out nothing of their speech. The merest murmur reached him. Hate began to stir in him so strongly that it lent him courage, and he ran crouching back to the road, and then, still crouching, to the copse. Through this he crawled like a cat, so silently that his progress was scarcely audible to himself, and therefore with great slowness. Now at least he could find out the terms on which Caterina and Mark Carroll met.

The Signora had waited at her post of observation until she had seen Mark rise first to his knees and then to his feet. She saw him walk to the stile and lay his hands upon it to steady himself, and then she emerged from her cover and crossed the field. When she came up to him he was breathing hard, with now and then a moan.

"Good evening, Marco," she said quietly, "I am afraid you are not well."

Mark turned his eyes upon her, and groaned

a curse. The Signora smiled a ghastly smile, and Mark, straightening himself with a prodigious effort, turned and made a step or two away from her. She intercepted him, and they stood face to face again.

"If you have come here," said Mark, in a groaning voice which he could scarcely manage, "in the hope of getting anything out of me, you have your pains for your trouble, and you can go back again."

He stood there before her feeble and helpless, and the stiletto was in her right hand beneath her mantle ready for use. She hated him well enough, and half wondered that she did not strike the blow. He had spoken in English, but she answered him in Italian.

"You lied to me long ago, and you determine to end as you began."

"You and that —— cousin of mine," said Mark, pantingly, "come too pat together not to know of each other, I fancy." Such a thrashing as Mark had endured does not tend to clear the wits, but he might have known how baseless that guess was in reality. "That doesn't matter," groaned Mark, "I shall live to pay him, and as for you, you can go to the Devil. I've done with you. Go!"

"Where can I go?" she asked. She was determined on the deed, and yet she had loved him once, and if she could have drawn a sign of pity from him, perhaps she might have stayed her hand. She said in her thoughts that he should

condemn himself by his own mouth. "How can I go?"

"You can go where you like and how you like," said Mark. "Let me get by, and be damned to you!"

If he had tried to harden her heart to the awful task she had set herself, he could scarcely have succeeded better. But she would test him yet. She knew he must wound her to the very quick before she could bear to strike him. Though she meant murder all along, she wanted it to feel like justice.

"You remember all the oaths you swore to me?" she asked him. He waited to pass her, and stood in a sullen rage, with all the flesh of his back and arms burning and stinging, and his very bones aching within him. "You remember how you swore, come weal or woe, that you would care for me? You remember all the arts you used?"

There was a little crackle in the undergrowth behind him, but neither of them noticed it.

"Arts?" said Mark. "Let me get by and put an end to this. There were precious few arts needed to catch a bird of your feather, my lady."

"Yet you thought it worth your while to use them," answered Caterina, making one step forward.

Mark broke out with a curse. "Let me get by, or—— If I lay my hands on you, you'll remember it. Let me get by." She faced him without moving hand or foot. "Let me pass,"

said Mark, "or I'll throttle you. I never laid my hands on a whore yet, but——"

He was down with a husky yell, and across his prostrate body Tito Malfi and Caterina were glaring at each other.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Mark Carroll recovered consciousness he was in bed in his own room in his uncle's house, a nurse was standing at a table, and the face of the chief medico of the county town was bending over him. The wounded man remembered in a flash everything that had happened. He tried to speak, and could not make a sound, but the doctor saw his pale lips move and bent his head to listen. Mark, seeing this, tried again, and just managed to whisper—

"Am I going to die?"

"You must not agitate yourself, Mr. Carroll," said the doctor. Mark's lips formed the words over again. "Everything," said the doctor, "depends upon your own courage and quiet."

Most medical men have a way of pooh-poohing the dread of death in a patient, but this particular man had religious scruples which may not have made him a better doctor, but were matters of stern conscience with him. Mark lay still, comprehending the gravity of the situation. He was too weak for much resolution, but he had made up his mind then and there that he would

not die if he had any voice in the matter. A man who can find strength to make up his mind upon that question rarely dies, but days passed by before it could be said that Mark was out of danger.

In the meantime Tom had got back to town, burning and occasionally flaming with anger. To have thrashed Mark was no relief to him. He did not desire to thrash him again, but recognised the uselessness of revenge as an anodyne in such a case as this. Perhaps Mark's villainy was phenomenal—at all events his cousin thought it so, and he could never think of it without thinking also of the benefits which he had heaped on Mark in the days of his own prosperity.

He had reached London by a train which left the county town after midnight, and his disorderd condition escaped notice at Montague Gardens; but when Baretti saw him next day he had a fine black eye, and his mouth was ludicrously puffed on one side. The knuckles of his left hand were so cut about that he had to wear a glove to conceal the wounds. The painter noticed all these things silently, and waited for Tom to begin his story.

"You were right, Baretti," said the youngster at length. "I don't care to talk about it. I taxed him—something came out down there—and I taxed him with it all. He made no pretence of an excuse, but admitted everything at once. We had a fight, and I thrashed him as long as I could lift my arm. Now let us forget him."

That was more easily said than done, though,

in spite of the volcanic rage which sometimes rose within him, he spoke no more of cousin Mark. The black eye and swollen lip kept him prisoner for some days, and he neglected the daily papers as a rule, otherwise he might have heard curious news. The daily papers throughout England, from the *Times* to the *Mudpool Evening Echo*, informed each its section of the public that Mr. Mark Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, had been found lying in one of his uncle's fields within three hundred yards of his uncle's gates, with signs of terrible violence upon his person, and an ivory-handled dagger of curious design stuck in his breast. Hopes were entertained of the unfortunate gentleman's recovery, and the police had a definite clue to the perpetrator of the crime. In these circumstances it might seem curious that no arrests were made, but after the first day or so the injured gentleman was himself responsible for that fact.

Being supposed by his medical men to be strong enough to be questioned as to the perpetrator of the deed, Mark answered nothing but this—

“Tell me when I am out of danger.”

The doctors looked gravely at each other and avoided Mr. Carroll's eye. The whole village of Overhill was absolutely certain as to the personality of the criminal, but by common tacit consent the old man was left to his own guesses. Where his suspicions were cast no man knew for certain, but his plump features wizened, and his rosy cheeks grew white, his proud head drooped, and he walked with a piteous uncertainty for so pompous and

lofty a man. Now and then an unconscious groan would escape him, and whilst Mark's fate was uncertain he scarcely ate or drank or slept. All this might grow out of concern for his nephew, but most people fancied that a breath of the popular suspicion had touched him.

Number Twenty Montague Crescent was watched night and day, and the police kept a hand above Tom Carroll ready to sweep down on him at any moment. At last the moment came.

Cousin Mark had always been inclined to laugh at popular cant about conscience, and death-bed repentances had always seemed to his firm and logical mind cowardly and useless. If there were a Deity at all—and Mark took leave to have a doubt upon that question—it must be extremely difficult to hoodwink Him, and He would scarcely think the better of a villain for adding cowardice to his list of vices. Whilst in full possession of health and strength the young man had been a downright atheist, on the grounds of reason and common sense, but now there intruded upon his mind a chilly dread. Suppose he had been wrong after all? This mental condition is common enough in the circumstances, and many divines have built argument upon it. The existence of the fact proves itself and nothing more, and Mark's mind, awakened as he was, was quick to see the fallacy of the theologian's trick. "I am afraid," said Mark to himself. "Well? What does that prove? That I *am* afraid." But for all that he lay for a day or two and faced the one awful mystery which all men have to face in

turn. The great insoluble, terrible problem stared at him, and he at it, and in spite of his stout unbelief he trembled. For he had a crime in his mind compared with which the peccadilloes of which he had been guilty seemed as nothing, and at this time he quailed before the promptings of his own vengeance. If he had died he would have gone to the grave in silence, with his lips sealed by a fear which he strove in vain to deride as a superstition. But when at the end of five weary days and nights the doctors gave him the assurance that his life was no longer in danger, his courage came back to him. Even then when they renewed their questions, he answered: -

"I am not strong enough to speak about it yet. Give me a day or two to grow strong in."

They urged that in the meantime the criminal might escape, but he only shook his head with a wry smile and declined a verbal answer. So they were compelled to let him alone and to bide his time. In the end he confided in the local doctor.

"Is anybody suspected?" he asked, when the nurse had been turned out of the room and the door had been locked.

"Yes," said the doctor. "There is a very general suspicion."

"If I had died instead of recovering as I have done," said Mark, "it would have been a hanging matter, I suppose?"

"In all probability," the doctor answered.

"That," said Mark, "was why I held my tongue. But, now, I don't think that any mawkish personal consideration ought to operate.

Society must be protected." Talking, even now, was a business of some difficulty, and he had to make frequent pauses. "Tell me who is suspected."

"Your unfortunate cousin," said the surgeon.

"Ah!" said Mark, with a sigh. "Is there any evidence against him?"

The surgeon told the common talk, based on Leggatt's narrative, and swollen a little from its first dimensions.

"Poor Tom!" said Mark. "I never thought his evil passions would have carried him so far. He stabbed his best friend, old fellow, in more senses than one when he stabbed me. I couldn't lie here and think of his going to the gallows over it, and so I thought it best to be quiet. It's an awful scandal. Can't we keep it dark after all? My poor old uncle!—one of the finest fellows in the world!—it will break his heart. Break the news to him gently, Morton. Does he suspect already?"

"We fear so," said the doctor. What a man this Mark Carroll was—the surgeon thought. Lying in the face of death for days and only planning to shield his murderous assailant by silence and to protect the honour of the family. Even now he thought more of his uncle than himself. When Mr. Morton, general practitioner, left Trench House, he eulogised Mark's conduct right and left, and people began to think of him as a quite angelic young man.

But before the doctor left he spoke with Mr. Carroll.

"I have had an interview with your nephew," he began. "I am happy to tell you that he is in

a fair way to complete recovery. Most happily the blade missed the vital organs."

"I am glad to know that, sir," said Mr. Carroll. "Extremely glad to know that." The surgeon lingered for a time without saying anything, and the master of the house looked up at him. "Have you anything to add to that communication?"

"I have to perform a task of great difficulty, sir," said the surgeon, tremulously. It falls to the lot of a doctor to break bad news oftener, perhaps, than to the lot of any other man in the world, but Mr. Morton was not old, and his present task was unlike any in his experience, and looked dreadful. "Your nephew has confided to me the secret he has kept since the night of the attempt upon his life. He has requested me to——"

"You may speak out plainly, sir," said Carroll, drawing himself to his old height and looking the surgeon in the face. "In a word—he accuses—whom?"

"Your son, sir," answered the surgeon. Mr. Carroll inclined his head in stern self-government and assent.

"I was not unprepared for such a revelation," he answered. His features twitched and quivered, and everything in the room was grey to him as if a sudden fog had spread about him, but he stood upright and took the blow like a man. He had given up loving Tom a long time ago. It had been a long time since he had loved anybody, but his family pride, like his personal pride, had been prodigious. The certainty which now followed on suspicion crushed that pride, and crushed him

with it; but he was resolute to conceal his anguish, and to play the Spartan. People had always had a right to admire him and wonder at him. They should have it still.

He unlocked a private drawer and took from it a paper, upon which he wrote the day of the month. It was a printed form, otherwise filled in already at the blank places, and he read the whole thing through whilst the surgeon stood looking on in amazement at his stoicism. Carroll held a quill pen in his hand, and this went hovering above the lines as he read them. The hand looked steady, but the quivering plume told how tense the nerves were, and by what an effort the palsied shaking was suppressed. When the wretched father had read through the document, he took up an unneeded piece of blotting-paper and and dabbed at the words he had written a minute or two before, though they were as dry as the rest.

"I shall do my duty, sir," he said, turning round upon his companion. The doctor saw that his eyes were bloodshot, though a minute or two before they had been clear. "This is a warrant for the apprehension of Thomas Carroll on a charge of attempted murder. Cutting and wounding with intent to do bodily harm, is the legal phrase employed. I shall do my duty. Oblige me by ringing the bell, if you please, sir."

The surgeon obeyed without moving his eyes from Carroll's face.

"I shall do my duty," said the miserable man again. He spoke like an automaton. A servant appearing in answer to the summons, he turned

his bloodshot eyes upon him, and with the same unnatural voice and manner said, "Tell John Hard to get the dog-cart ready, and then come to me." The man bowed and disappeared. "I shall do my duty."

He folded the warrant and put it in an envelope, the paper rustling noisily in the silence of the room. In answer to a tap at the door he cried, "Come in," and the servant re-entered. "Well?" inquired his master.

"You told me to come to you, sir, when I had given Hard your orders."

"I told you to send Hard to me," returned Mr. Carroll, with frosty majesty, "when he had got the dog-cart ready."

"I beg your pardon, sir." The servant retired again, closing the door noiselessly.

"I shall do my duty," said the master of the house for the fifth time. The persistent iteration of this phrase alarmed the surgeon as much as the bloodshot eyes, the swollen veins in the temples, and the palsied rustling of the paper in a hand that looked as steady as a rock. "Pray direct this envelope for me, Mr. Morton," said Carroll, after a pause. "Mr. Superintendent Lewis, Police Station, Fernock."

The surgeon with a shaky hand wrote down the address dictated, and for a minute or two there was silence. It seemed a long time before the groom came to take the letter.

"Drive with this to Fernock with all possible speed," said Mr. Carroll. The groom took it and withdrew. "I have done my duty," said the

wretched man, and at that moment the doctor ran forward and caught him in his arms.

There was no necessity for alarming the house, and the surgeon's nerves were tranquil and his brain cool again now that he had work to do. Bodily agony—bodily trouble of any sort—was a thing he had ceased to be afraid of, but the mental pain he had inflicted was more than he could easily endure to look at. He took off the patient's stiff and old-fashioned satin stock, opened his collar, laid his head back, and sprinkled his face with cold water. It was perhaps as well for Mr. Carroll that he had fainted. A little more of that pretended stoicism, and it might have ended in apoplexy, for he had a tendency that way.

He came round in time and sat up weak and quivering. An hour went by before the surgeon thought it safe to leave him, and then the news of Mark's declaration went through the village like wild-fire.

Mark himself had had plenty of time to weigh the pros and cons before he decided upon this final lie of his. There were many cogent reasons in its favour. For one thing, Tom had given him such a thrashing as mortal man rarely receives, and Mark wanted revenge for it. Again, to mention the Signora would be to provoke inquiry as to his past relations with that young person, and to have her arrested would be to publish in an assize court a statement about himself which would infallibly ruin him with his uncle. He would have liked to be revenged upon the Signora also, but that could wait. One thing at a time. He

could pay Tom for that tremendous hiding with which his bones yet ached, and at the same move he could get rid of him as a rival for the Trench House estates at once and for ever.

Whilst he had the fear of death before his eyes, he could not find courage for this supreme rascality, but now that he was safe, he could survey it calmly and quietly enough. The prospect of such a vengeance as he planned would have excited some people, and have retarded recovery. Mark took it tranquilly. It soothed him to think of it, and he began to mend rapidly.

Mr. Superintendent Lewis, happening to be within when John Hard arrived with Mr. Carroll's missive, opened it at once, cast his eye over it, put it in his pocket-book, instructed his wife to pack his portmanteau, and set out by the next train for London. He arrived there in the early evening, announced himself at Scotland Yard, and in company with a town officer, drove in a four-wheeled cab to Montague Gardens. The cabman, pursuant to instructions, pulled up at Number Twenty, and the two alighted. Mr. Superintendent Lewis rang the bell.

"Does Mr. Carroll live here, my dear?"

The two officers were in plain clothes, and the girl fired up at the address.

"Don't my dear me, if you please," she said. "What do you want with Mr. Carroll? What name?"

Mr. Superintendent Lewis walked in. The London officer followed, closing the door behind him.

"Sorry to bring unpleasant news," said the superintendent. "We are officers of the law, my dear, and I have a warrant for Mr. Carroll's apprehension."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the girl, trembling. There was not a creature in the house by whom Tom Carroll was not beloved.

"Here's my authority," said the official, calmly. "Show us up, there's a good girl, and let us have it over."

The girl held on to the stair-rail for a moment, and then, rallying her forces, led the way. She indicated the door, and the superintendent tapped at it. Tom Carroll's voice called "Come in," and the two men entered. Tom and Baretti were sitting on opposite sides of the fire.

"Mr. Carroll?" said the superintendent, looking inquiringly from one to the other.

"Well?" asked Tom, rising.

"It is my duty to arrest you, sir," said the officer, "on a charge of maliciously wounding with intent. I hope you'll come quietly."

"Maliciously wounding?" cried Tom. "Maliciously wounding whom?"

"Mr. Mark Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, on the evening of the twenty-ninth ult.," responded the officer. "My name's Lewis—Superintendent Lewis, of Fernock. This gentleman is from Scotland Yard." Tom and Baretti were staring at each other. "I should advise you to say nothing at present," added the officer, in obedience to instructions for such cases made and provided. "You may make any statement you

like, but it is my duty to tell you that anything you say will be taken down and used against you on your trial."

"Maliciously wounding?" said Tom again. "They can't define *that* as maliciously wounding."

"Well, I don't know, sir," returned the superintendent, using a toothpick with great sang-froid, but keeping a careful eye upon his man. "Six inches of cold steel into him."

"What?" cried the prisoner, with face and voice of horror and amazement.

"Found at nine ten on the evening of the twenty-ninth ult.," said the officer, quietly, "at the edge of Marston's Spinney, at Overhill, with the blade of an ivory-handled dagger sticking in him."

"Who accuses me?" asked Tom.

"I don't rightly know," returned the superintendent, "but I suppose it's the gentleman himself."

"Carroll," cried Baretti, "you are innocent. Tell me you are innocent."

"Yes," said Tom. "I am innocent."

"I hope you'll prove it so at the proper quarter," said Mr. Lewis, tranquilly polite. "I must trouble you to come, sir, if you please. You'll want to take a few things with you, perhaps. I dare say the young woman we saw outside could pack you a handbag or something of that kind."

"I will do it," said Baretti, and he went into the next room with his head whirling. Was Tom guilty? It would be miserable if he were, but to Baretti's mind by no means unnatural. The painter was as tender-hearted a little man as any in

the world, but he would have dreaded the temptation of standing before Mark Carroll with a dagger ready to his own hand. He had seen Tom enraged once, and he remembered now how his nature had seemed to change with the passion of his anger. The officer from Scotland Yard looked in to hurry the process of packing, and found Baretti sitting on the ledge of the bed, the picture of bewilderment and misery.

"I'll give the gentleman a helping hand," he said to his confrère, and then, advancing, "Come, come, sir," he added to Baretti, "this won't do no good. Point out to me what to take, and I'll put the things up."

Baretti half mechanically threw open a wardrobe and began to lay out linen and underclothing. Next he found a small portmanteau, and the official began to pack the things neatly into it.

"You will want your dressing-case, Carroll?" asked Baretti, through the open door-way.

"Yes," said Tom, mechanically.

Baretti produced it, and the man looked into it, and shook his head at the razors.

"All right," he said, fastening the case with a snap, "they'll take care of 'em at the station. That all, sir? Come along." He carried the things into the next room, and set them down in an arm-chair.

"Carroll," cried the painter, darting at his friend and seizing him by both arms, "can you recall everything that took place that night? Are you sure of everything?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I am sure of everything."

"And you used no weapon?"

"I broke my walking-stick over him," cried Tom, with some of the old rage rising in his cheek and glittering in his eye, "but used no other weapon."

"He harmed another man as much as you, or nearly," said Baretti. "Carroll! I see Malfi's hand in this."

"I would say no more if I were in your place, sir," said the superintendent. "Time's precious, too, and I must ask you to come along."

"May I come with you?" sked Baretti.

"That's as you like," returned the officer. "But you can do no good, so far as I see."

Baretti's mention of Malfi had set Tom thinking.

"Baretti," he said suddenly, "the Signora was there that day. Trace her, if you can. My hands are tied. I can do nothing. I am in deep waters, Baretti. Help me."

"I would lay down my life for you," said Baretti, with tears in his eyes at this appeal. "Fear nothing, Carroll. I will be cunning in your cause, and strong and untiring. I told you that one day I would repay you. By God's help, Carroll, I will pay you now."

The two wrung each other hard by both hands, and the superintendent stepped between them with a something that clattered a little and glittered in the lamplight.

"Is that necessary?" asked Tom. "I will go quietly."

"Very well, sir," said the officer, "I'm willing to make things as pleasant as I can." He signed

to Baretti. "Do you mind carrying those things down, sir? You'll find a four-wheeler at the door. Now, sir," to Tom, "if you'll allow this gentleman your arm I'll take the other."

Baretti took up his wideawake hat and put it on, then took up the portmanteau and the dressing-case and walked down stairs. The maid, the landlady, and her husband were standing beneath the lamp in the hall. The girl opened the door for him and whispered as he passed.

"Is it true, sir? Is Mr. Carroll arrested?"

He nodded gloomily and passed on. A moment later the two officers with their captive arm-in-arm between them came somewhat clumsily down the stairs, which were not quite wide enough for a procession so arranged. The landlady burst into tears at the sight, and wrung her hands. She knew of Tom's monetary misfortunes, at least in part, by this time.

"Oh! Mr. Carroll, sir, what is it? If it's money, sir, here's Walker ready, sir, if it's a bill of sale on the very furniture."

"That's extremely good of *you*, ma'am," said the superintendent, "but it isn't money. Let us get away, ma'am, if you please."

The two hurried Tom into the cab, and Baretti followed. Not a word was spoken by the way, but at the police station the friends were parted.

"Trace Signora Malfi," were Tom's last words to him.

"Carroll," cried the painter, "I will leave no stone unturned. Good-bye. Be brave." Tom went quietly away with a policeman in his rear, and

Baretti, half-blinded with tears, walked into the street. "I will save you," he said. "I will save you. Best of friends, best of men, unhappiest, I will save you."

CHAPTER X.

THE Signora was back in London, and had brought with her the ghost she dreaded. All day long and all night long she struck the blow over again, and Mark's husky shriek answered it, his body fell at her feet, and Malfi glared into her eyes across it. The blow, the cry, the fall, the glance followed each other without pause or break, whether she were in the streets amongst the grinding noises of the town or in her own chamber with all sounds locked out. Whether she read, sewed, walked, ate, slept, it was all one. She struck the blow, Mark shrieked and dropped, and she was staring at Malfi. It had all been done in three seconds, and every three seconds did it over again. She was not sorry, she was not afraid, or softened, but the burthen of this continued iteration was tremendous and scarcely to be borne. The constant series of recurring images and sound did not shut out thought, or, in any way, beyond its awful grating on the nerves, unfit her for the common uses of life.

Malfi fled and she followed him. He would have distanced her and got clear away, but for a

heavy tumble in the first score yards. When she came up with him he was half dead with terror until he saw that her hands were empty, and even then he knelt quaking in the grass, with his clasped hands quivering before him.

"Get up, coward!" she said disdainfully. "Are you jealous now?"

"You have killed him," gasped Signor Malfi.

"Hold your tongue," said the Signora. "You are no safer than I am. I swear that if you do not help me away I will charge you with the crime. You came prepared to kill him. You threatened him in my hearing. Give me what money you have and let me go."

He shook before her and implored her incoherently whilst he fumbled in his pockets. It was perfectly true that he had thought himself ripe for murder, but then he had never looked at it. To have stood by, to have seen the blow and heard the yell that answered it, and then to have caught those eyes with murder in them suddenly fixed on his—all this was experience, and his ideas of himself under such conditions had been merely theoretical hitherto. The Signora's threat terrified him, and he knew her now as being capable of anything.

"Let me keep a little to get away with," he implored her, holding out in one shaky hand a purse and a handful of jingling silver in the other. Caterina took the purse.

"We are safest apart," she said. "Take your way, and I will take mine."

With that she turned and walked swiftly

away, and it was at that moment she began to strike the blow and hear the cry again. She found a road and followed it, hiding once or twice at the sound of footsteps. At the end of five miles she found a railway station and took train for London. She had an hour or two to wait in the county town, and the train which carried Tom Carroll bore her also. At the terminus she saw him alight, and she lingered until he had gone lest she should be seen and recognised. She took a room in an Italian coffee-house, and lived there for days. Signor Malfi's purse was well stocked, and she was provided for many weeks to come.

Tom Carroll never saw the daily papers, but the Signora began to spell them through with great eagerness on the morning of her return to town. On the first day the journal was dumb on the matter in which she was interested. On the morning of the second day she learned that Mr. Mark Carroll, nephew of Mr. Thomas Carroll, J. P., of Trench House, Overhill, had been stabbed and lay in a precarious condition. She learned also that the police had a clue, and this, since she was naturally ignorant of the ways of British police and British journals, alarmed her as it would have alarmed no practised criminal. She half decided on flight, but lay still, partly through fear of the danger of running away. Every morning she spelled through her daily paper until she found the thing she looked for, and at last she learned that her victim was on the way to recovery, and had accused his cousin, who was under arrest for

attempted murder. This presented no puzzle to the Signora, who had had so much experience of the yearning for revenge that she could understand its operations in other people. She recognised a sort of mastery of generalship in the manoeuvre. Mark would crush his cousin that way, and would seat himself more firmly than ever on his throne at Overhill, and he would get besides a full revenge for the thrashing Tom had given him. He despised her for the meantime, and could afford to forego one revenge to feed upon another. She would rather that he had turned and struck at her. She had loved him, she had hated him, she had tried to kill him. In answer he ignored her, and that was tenfold more hateful than any revenge he could have taken.

She was not sorry that he was alive. When you hate as the Signora hated you create an unbearable blank in life by removing the object of your passion. She had him still to hate, and that was something. To have killed him every day would have been a regal pleasure, but you cannot have your cake and eat it, often. For once she had tasted vengeance, and it was in her power to taste it again. How to get at it?

Her own instinct told her, but she feared the road. Samson (though the Signora knew nothing of that history) crushed himself to kill his enemies. Her rage led her that way, but as yet it was hardly strong enough, and the time was not yet ripe. She would wait and see.

She lay close, therefore, and every day she spelled through her copy of the morning paper

until at last she lighted on the thing she sought. Tom Carroll had undergone his first examination, had denied the charge, and had been remanded without bail. When the Signora could not understand a word, she asked the people at her lodging-house and had it explained, a course which made it manifest that she took strong interest, either in general or particular police proceedings. Perhaps it was not an uncommon symptom there, but nobody seemed greatly to notice it. The days went on, and Mr. Mark Carroll was sufficiently recovered from the effects of the murderous attack made upon him by the defendant to appear in court, where he swore that it was his cousin's hand and no other which struck the blow. The Signora read, though she attached no significance to the statement, that Mr. Lording was in court. The prisoner was defended, but called no witnesses. The testimony of the prosecutor remained unshaken: the prisoner was formally committed to take his trial, and bail was refused. Mark was on his way to a perfect triumph. The Signora was on the way to vengeance, but at every step she counted the cost and trembled. None the less she was on the way.

Baretti was not idle all this time, but his hands were tied, and he could do nothing that seemed to be of use. He went down to Overhill and made inquiries in person, and thereby discovered that two people answering to the description of Signor Malfi and the Signora had been in the village on the day of the attack. He engaged privately the services of the police, and set one

or two active men to look for Tito and Caterina, and, in that way, spent a good deal of money to no purpose. When the authorities allowed of it he saw Tom Carroll and tried to cheer him, but he found that work too heavy for his own foreboding heart. The passion of his love and gratitude for his preserver had come back in full tide upon him, and whilst these troublous times endured Tom was of more value to him even than his love.

"I will be loyal," he would say to himself at times. "I *will* be loyal. I *will* be loyal." It was not his fault that the devil tempted him with visions of Tom Carroll's last chance of Mary's love destroyed. The temptation only made him loathe himself. It never shook him for a single instant; its baseness was too open and too palpable.

The time of the trial drew near, and he had as yet done nothing of real service to his friend. He was abroad in the streets of London, wandering miserably in the early night time, when the lamps were newly lighted and the town was like a dream. He had walked for some hours, not caring in what direction his unguided footsteps led him, and standing suddenly still to look about him, he found that he had walked beyond his own knowledge, and was in a part of the city which was strange to him. A figure fluttered across the street out of shadow into light, and swiftly out of light into shadow again. It came dimly to his mind that this had happened once or twice before, but he was in a condition altogether dreamlike, and many sleepless nights had combined with his anxieties to drug intelligence. It

did not seem worth while to ask his way. He was likely enough to come on a place he knew by-and-by, or if he did not, he was in no hurry to get home, and a hansom cab was always to be found. His unconscious footsteps took him on again, and a singular half-consciousness grew upon him (as it grows upon us in our dreams) that something near at hand was following and tracking him. This fancy developing quite suddenly into a fear, he turned short round, and a figure fluttered into the dark behind him, but not before an almost certain recognition had set his heart beating. He ran in the direction of the flying figure, and now every nerve in his body was alert. It amazed him when the fugitive stopped suddenly and faced him beneath a gas-lamp. He paused before her panting (not with the chase, for that was too brief to have put him out of breath), and seized the Signora by both wrists. She made no effort to remove his hold, but stood panting back at him, though he knew that (when he had time to think about it afterwards) more from the look upon her face than any other sign he noticed.

"We have met at last," she said, in her own language. "I have followed you many times in the street, but I have not dared to speak to you. We have met at last, and I must tell you." There she looked first downwards at the hands that held her, and then at her captor's face, with a glance of strange inquiry. "Why do you hold me?"

"I charge you," said Baretti, in a voice so

husky that he could scarcely make himself heard, "I charge you with the attempted murder of Mark Carroll."

The lids of her great black eyes drew together, and she looked at him through half closed lashes. "You do not charge me," she said, and then in a second, with a gesture of both hands which freed them from Baretti's grasp, "I charge myself. I am my own accuser." Her eyes flashed wide again as she spoke, and her bosom rose with a single tempestuous heave. "Come," she said, "where I can talk with you. I have followed you for days to tell you, but I could never find the courage until now."

"Come to the nearest police-station," said Baretti, quietly.

"No," she answered, with a noticeable smile. "Not there. Why need you grudge me a few words? Can I outrun you even if I were to try? The first policeman we pass would take your word against me. I can do better for you, better for your friend, and better for myself if you will follow my way. Take me to some place where I can talk with you."

The city street was empty, and so silent in its deserted state that the tread of a policeman in one of the roads which led out of it was heard distinctly.

"Walk on before me," said Baretti.

"I beg of you, I pray of you," she answered, "that you will hear me first. I cannot bargain with you, because any policeman will take your word against me. Do not refuse me."

"I will hear you," said Baretti. "Walk on before me."

She walked on without a word, and the painter followed a yard or two behind. They came in a while to streets which at that hour were more frequented, and by-and-by a hansom crawled in sight. Baretti hailed it, the Signora at his signal entered and the cabman, having received instructions, drove to Montague Gardens. Not a word was exchanged until the cab drew up, when Baretti took Caterina by the arm to secure her.

"You are wasting trouble," she said then. "How can I run away? I do not wish to run away. I followed you for days to speak to you."

At that he released her, but kept a wary eye for her whilst he paid the man his fare and whilst afterwards he unlocked the door. Caterina stood on the pavement like a statue, and never moved until he motioned to her to enter. Then she walked forward tranquilly, and at his bidding ascended the stairs. His own room reached, he turned up the lamps that glimmered feebly on the mantle-shelf, and faced his guest.

"What have you to say to me?" he demanded.

"I have to say, in the first place," she answered, "that it was I who tried to kill your friend's cousin. When the right time comes I am willing to tell the whole world, but not before."

The Signora was a handsome woman in her way, and at this moment, with her southern eyes on fire and her southern cheeks all pale, her lovely bosom heaving and falling, and her large white hands clutched across it as if to keep it still, she

looked beautiful and terrible. Baretti faced her in a suppressed excitement almost equalling her own.

"Let me tell you everything," she went on, "and then you will understand. I was never Tito's wife, and I never cared for him very much. He was a poor thing, but in his way he loved me, and I was content to go on with him until the day when we both met you close at hand here, when you and Marco and his cousin were together. You remember?"

"I remember."

"You left Marco with us to do some little business for Tito, who could not speak English. You remember?"

"I remember," he said again,

"We met often after that, Marco and I," she went on, "and by-and-by he began to make love to me, and I began to listen to him and believe him. You do not know what my life has been, Signor Baretti, and I do not wish to tell you. But I had never cared for a man before, and he made me love him. He promised me that he would take care of me as long as I lived. I did not ask him to marry me, for I would have been contented——" The heaving breast, clenched hands, and burning eyes filled in the pause. "I loved him," she went on. "I would have died for him. I would have followed him barefooted round the world, begging my bread, to see him once a day. Well, he got tired of me, and Tito suspected, and went to his rooms one night when I was there. He hid me until Tito had gone, and

then he told me I might go also. I had loved him like a dog, and he sent me away like a dog. I saw then what manner of man I had loved, and he sent me into the street knowing that I should be homeless there. Well, I can hate as well as I can love, and after a long time I made up my mind that I would kill him. Then, that looked too terrible."

She paused again, and Baretti was still silent.

"He had been so base," she pursued, "that a mean revenge seemed to suit my hatred of him. His cousin, who is a stupid good young man, your friend, had been cast away by his father, and I have found out why, because I was there at the Concert Hall when the thing happened. I thought if his father is so severely good as to cast off his own son for nothing, what will he do with Marco when he knows the truth about him? So I went to expose Marco."

She tried to moisten her dry lips with a tongue as dry as themselves, and Baretti poured out a glass of wine from a decanter on the table, and pushed it across to her. She took it with an inclination of the head, drank it off, and set down the glass.

"I met him near his uncle's house, and I told him why I was there. He laughed at me, and jeered me. 'You,' he said, 'are the cast-off mistress of my cousin, and you are here to try to wreck my fortunes. But nobody will believe you, and everybody will believe me. Go home again. I will not be hard with you. Meet me at evening, and I will give you money to go back with.' I

had told him I had no money, and could not return. I bade him farewell for the time, and I went desperate, having but one road to my revenge left open. I looked at my stiletto often that afternoon, but I should not have used it if it had not been—— He spoke words to me which nobody but a hound uses. I saw your friend meet him whilst I waited. I saw your friend flog him like a slave.”

She enjoyed this recollection even now, terrible as the moment was, and Baretti saw as much.

“They fought at first, but Marco was beaten, and the poor innocent acted like a man. When he had broken his stick he left off and went away. Then it became my turn, and I went up and spoke to Marco. Up till then I had been hidden, and neither of them had seen me. I need not tell you what happened then. Even then, if he had cared to be kind, I could not have struck him. I thought he was dead when I came away.”

Her bosom heaving with a slow tempestuous swell, she stood silent, and at length Baretti was constrained to speak.

“All this is what I knew or guessed before. If you have nothing more to tell me, I must give you up at once to justice. For me,” he added, with a momentary flash in his black eyes, “you might go free as air, but I have my friend to save and his enemy to punish.”

“His enemy to punish!” cried the woman in a passion so sudden and vivid that he started at

it as he might have done at a flash of lightning. "His punishment is in my hands." She cooled again. "Why have I stayed in England, do you think, Signor Baretti?" He could have answered that question from the tone in which she put it, and the fire that gleamed in her eyes. "I could have been away safe from pursuit long ago, for Tito had given me money, and nobody at first suspected me. Why did I follow you day after day? Do you think I do not know what I am going to? I will tell you, Signor, why I stayed. When I found he was not dead, I saw that I had not thrown away all my revenge for a minute's rage. I know why he charged his cousin with the crime. It is his last blow to crush him, and he thinks that he himself is safe. Now I wait—for what? To hear him speak his lie before the whole world, and when his lie has triumphed to stand up there and drag him down with it and ruin him."

"He has deserved all that," said Baretti, half to himself, "and more."

"Yes," she answered, calm and quiet again, "he has deserved it."

The painter threw himself into a chair and reviewed the situation. The Signora, uninvited, poured out and drank a second glass of wine, and then bestowed herself upon a sofa. Baretti, looking once or twice to where she sat in shadow, could see her eyes gleaming, though he could not make out another feature of her face.

"You are sure," he said, rising and confronting her after a lengthy pause, "that you

are strong enough in your resolution to carry it to the end?"

"I am sure of that," she answered.

"I am not sure," said Baretti.

"If you knew how to hate," returned the lady, placidly enough, "you would be."

"Possibly," returned the painter. "You will understand, Signora, that I have no personal quarrel with you. If Mr. Mark Carroll had died, and my friend had been in danger, I should see you hanged to release him very gladly, but otherwise I should not have been sorry to see you escape, and, knowing what I know, might even have been tempted to assist you. I am sorry to incommode you, but I distrust your resolution, and if I refrain from giving you up to the proper authorities at once, I must at least see you in safe keeping. A very excellent person happens to be known to me, the wife of an English officer of police. She is a person of resolution and courage equal to your own, and I think I may entrust you to her keeping. I am afraid you must consent to be locked up in the interim. Or, better still—I had an interview with Mr. Thomas Carroll's lawyer this afternoon, and learned from him that he would be at his offices until long past the present hour. We will consult him, and we will be bound by his advice."

"I will go anywhere and do anything," said the Signora, rising and drawing her mantle about her, "if you will promise me one thing. Signor, I am in your power, and I cannot make conditions. I can only beg. Do not rob me of this one thing."

Let Marco accuse his cousin before he knows that I am ready to deny him."

"I think we can secure so much for you, Signora," said Baretti. "In the meantime will you accompany me?"

He turned down the lamps again, and he and the Signora left the house together unobserved. Baretti's heart beat high with triumph, and the vengeance the Signora proposed to take upon Mark seemed to him—for he, though a high-minded and most chivalrous person in some things, was not a finished Christian—suitable and befitting. For the present, at least, he had no fear of Caterina's resolution, and no doubt of the honesty of her professions. He drove her to the offices of the man of law who had Tom Carroll's case in charge, and for once in his life an old criminal solicitor confessed himself amazed.

The criminal solicitor, whose name was Cohen, had an eagle eye. He was not a finished Christian any more than Baretti, and when once he had grasped the story, he hailed the chance for a grand theatrical coup such as it offered with much gratification.

"Does the young woman speak English?" he asked, turning an admiring eye on the Signora, who sat in a dusky corner of his room. "Women, Mr. Baretti, are not to be handled like men, and I entirely agree with you that this young person should be taken care of until the time arrives at which we can make use of her evidence. In the meantime we had better take her whilst she is in

the mind, and make her sign a statement. Wait a moment."

He wrote busily for a minute, and having finished, threw the sheet of foolscap over the table to Baretti.

"Oblige me by turning that into Italian, Mr. Baretti. I have one or two things to look at in the meantime."

Baretti read through the document.

"I———the undersigned, hereby make confession that on the 29th September last I stabbed Mark Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, in the County of Worcester. I declare that I was a witness of the interview between the said Mark Carroll and his cousin Thomas Carroll, of Number Twenty, Montague Gardens, London, West, at Overhill, on the 29th September last, as aforesaid, and that no knife was used in the conflict between them. As witness my hand."

When Baretti had translated this into Italian, the solicitor took the translation and rapidly wrote below it the original English, leaving a wide space between.

"Let her sign," he said, casting the sheet once more across the table, and the Signora, marching in outward tranquillity to the table, signed, with a firm hand, after reading the document, and resumed her seat. "Now, Mr. Baretti," said the lawyer, "write, 'I declare this to be a fair and just translation of the foregoing.' Thank you. Will you ask the young woman if she is willing to submit herself to my care during the next two or three days. I shall keep her under lock and key

and entrust her to my housekeeper. Tell her that, if you please."

"I understand," said the Signora in English. "I shall not change my mind."

"Very well, my dear," said Cohen, who was a man of phlegm. "You will keep your counsel, Mr. Baretti. We seem to have to deal with a very ready and unscrupulous scoundrel, but I think we shall hoist him this time. You may leave the lady in my care."

"I may let my friend know that he is safe?" asked Baretti.

"Oh, yes," returned the solicitor. "Ease his mind, poor fellow. But don't let him blab, even to a warder. It's a great case. I shall come down to Worcester myself personally. I am busy, but I can't afford to miss a thing like this. One moment before you go, Mr. Baretti. There is a public-house at the corner. This document is not yet witnessed, and the landlord has obliged me once or twice before. Will you kindly ask him to step this way? Thank you."

Baretti was in the street in a moment, thanking God with an uplifted heart for his friend's deliverance. The Signora was out of his thoughts for the time, and it was enough for him to think just then that Tom Carroll was already virtually a free man, and that the just punishment of Mark's villainy was creeping nearer and nearer. The landlord of the corner public-house did not seem in the least degree to be surprised at the request Baretti had to proffer, but got into his coat at once and crossed to the office.

"Put your hand to this, Mr. Slape," said the criminal solicitor. The landlord signed. "Thank you. Good evening." And the man was gone. "Odd fellow that, Mr. Baretti," said the lawyer, with a laugh. "There's scarcely a document in the world that man will sign without consulting me, unless it's a receipt for money paid to him, but I believe—in fact I know that he would sign this confession in his own name if I asked him to do it. Here's my name as witness number two, and now the thing's complete. Good night, Mr. Baretti. Rely on me to produce the lady at the proper time and place."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. CARROLL, however disposed to play the Spartan father, was not equal to an attendance at the County Assizes, though, if he had been called as a member of the Grand Jury, he had strung himself up to go and do his duty. It is not worth while to examine too closely into human motives. The precise compound of foolish pride and stubborn courage which supported him at this crisis have enabled passably great men to do really great things, and will again. Mr. Carroll set his whole soul on the accomplishment of one impossibility. He tried his hardest, whilst his only son awaited his trial for attempted murder, to behave as if nothing extraordinary were happening. He failed,

of course, and people sympathised with him in proportion with his effort and his failure.

One thing, at least, he contrived to do. He attended to business precisely as of old—missed no engagement, muddled no bargain.

On the morning of the trial he addressed his nephew:

“Nephew Mark. You will have occasion to be in town to-day. Make a deposit for me, if you please, at the County Bank. If you cast your eye over the papers here, you will understand everything.”

Mark bowed sympathetically, and took the papers indicated. Mr. Carroll retired to his own room and bore his miseries in secret, whilst his nephew made his simple preparations for the brief journey before him. Mark's occasional ventures abroad since his disaster had been accompanied by much curious sympathy, and now almost everybody in the village found casual business on the road between Trench House and Overhill railway station, or on the platform itself. He rode down to the station in a closed carriage, and the station master found him a private room on his arrival. When the train drew up to the platform the local policeman and the porter (temporarily sent down to supply the place of the official who had to give evidence of the discovery of the wounded man) had much ado to clear a line for Mark to the door of the first-class compartment reserved for him. Hats went off on all sides amid a subdued, respectful murmur. “Glad to see you about again, sir,” “Glad to see you about again,”

"Doan't he look pale, poor feller," and the like. "Poor Master Thomas," said one, whom Mark overheard. "He *have* brought his pigs to a pretty market, haven't he?"

This was a foretaste of what was going to happen all his life long in the future. Mark was resolved on being a popular landlord when he came to his own, and he was starting with the sympathy and approbation of everybody in the district. Things had happened very fortunately for him, and he was willing to admit to himself that nothing could have chanced more luckily than that Caterina should turn up on the night of Tom's revenge, and thus give the doubly assailed one his only chance of repaying the assailed. Mark had a faculty which is sometimes erroneously supposed to belong to sympathetic people: he could project himself pretty fairly into another man's mind, and could partly tell what was going on there under given conditions. He could, in some degree, comprehend the rage and wonder in Tom's heart at this accusation of his, and he could look at the whole matter from all the points he knew of without prejudice. Conscience was silent. Conscience is the monitor of failure. It is the defeated rascal whose heart is gnawn by the keen truth of her reproach, not the prosperous. Nor did he hate Tom overmuch after all, in spite of the wrong he had done and the wrong he meant to do him. Tom was in his way and must be put out of it. Mark was pleased and soothed by the sense of his own mastery of the situation, and the state of his mind

might fairly be described as judicial with this understanding—that whatever was good for Mark Carroll was just.

As he rode along he examined the papers his uncle had entrusted to his care. It was not disagreeable for the heir expectant to discover that he held between two and three thousand pounds in his fingers. Lately he was beginning to know pretty well what his uncle was worth, and the knowledge was satisfactory. The substantial lump he had now in his possession felt absolutely like his own. He smiled to think that at one time not very distant he might have been tempted to run away with so large a sum. There was no temptation now. There was nothing to run away from, nothing to run away to. He had everything he hoped for—money, luxury, social state, and the power to crush his sole rival.

One of the Trench House servants rode in the same train, and on his arrival at the county town stepped forward and secured a conveyance for him. Mark drove at once to the Assize Court, where a seat was found for him. It was not often that a county has the luck to listen to such a case as the great Carroll scandal, and, as a matter of course, the house was filled. Mark was still a trifle pale, and was generally considered to look "interesting." The county ladies were present in shoals, and their pretty toilettes lit up the dingy old building until it looked like a flower-show. They levelled their opera-glasses at the prosecutor in this most attractive case, and most of them admired him. It may be confessed that

Mark's demeanour was almost perfect, the dominant thereof being a manly seriousness, as of one who knew the terrible character of the day, but was calmly possessed of himself and tranquilly resolute to do his duty.

The case before the jury when Mark entered was one of arson, an unusual crime in that peaceful district, and one which in other circumstances would have been watched with great interest. Now nobody listened to it and the very gentlemen of the jury had but one eye apiece for the witnesses and reserved the other for Mark Carroll. The case against the incendiary was as clear as day, and an hour or two after the opening of the court a verdict of "Guilty" was returned. The man was sentenced and led away amidst a stir and buzz, which referred, not to him, but to the great case of the Assize, now approaching.

Wigged heads went together in the well of the court, and papers were rustled to and fro on the table. The judge laid by his notes of the arson case, and tried a new quill on his thumb nail. There was everywhere a little audible flutter, and with all necks craned and all eyes strained to look at him the prisoner walked into the dock. He bowed to the judge, and then, with both hands on the rail, he scanned the court. At first he was so absorbed in looking for Baretti that he had no time to notice how everybody was staring at him, but when he had once found his friend, and exchanged glances with him, the knowledge that he was there as a sort of raree show came home to him, and he had to bear it as best he

could. There was comfort in Baretti's look, which was undisguisedly triumphant.

The clerk of arraigns challenged the prisoner in the old legal jargon, the prisoner pleaded "Not Guilty." Counsel in a score or two of dry sentences expounded the charge, and the play began.

Henry Leggatt, in answer to the gentle leading of the counsel for the Crown, deposed that he was station-master at Overhill. That he was well acquainted with the prisoner. That on the night of September 29th last, he saw the prisoner at the railway station at Overhill, his clothes being at that time strangely disordered, and his hands and the wristbands of his shirt covered with blood. That the prisoner directed him to Mark Carroll, who might be in need of assistance, stating that he (prisoner) had half killed him. That witness, in company with Philip Piggott, railway porter, obeyed the instructions of the prisoner, and on arriving at Marston Spinney, found many evidences of a severe struggle, and at last, being guided by his groanings, discovered Mr. Carroll with the ivory handle of a dagger sticking out of him. (Dagger produced.) That Dr. Marks being summoned came at once, accompanied by Dr. Morton, and the injured man was conveyed to Trench House.

Cross-examined: Remembered distinctly that a foreign-looking woman arrived by train at Overhill on the morning of the day in question. Remembered to have seen her and Mr. Mark Carroll in conversation. Spoke to Mr. Mark about it. Was informed by Mr. Mark that this lady was in Overhill to look after Mr. Thomas—the prisoner.

Remembered Mr. Thomas arriving by a later train. Remembered also that having known Mr. Thomas for many years, and having always had a liking for him, he warned him of the lady's presence in the village. Would know the lady again among a thousand. Portrait produced was undoubtedly a good likeness.

This line of cross-examination seemed to Mark to betoken unpleasant things; but he was prepared to have aspersions cast upon him, and, on reflection, he could see that a defence of that sort was no defence at all, and would recoil on the heads of those who used it. To try to blacken a man's character after sticking a dagger into him! He could already in fancy see and hear the style in which a British judge and a British jury would resent that infamy.

Philip Piggott, porter at Overhill railway station, being examined, in part confirmed the evidence of the first witness. Counsel for the prisoner declined to cross-examine.

Drs. Marks and Morton gave evidence as to the call to attend the wounded man and the nature of his injuries. Under cross-examination confessed themselves certain, or thereabouts, that with the one marked exception, all the injuries were inflicted with a walking-stick, the fragments of which were found within a yard or two of the evident scene of conflict.

The way having been thus made clear and straight for the hero of the day, Mark Carroll was called and put into the witness-box. The light in Baretti's face discomfited him for a moment, but

he settled down to his business, and gave his evidence with a grave distinctness and an absence of apparent malice which gained him high credit with the court.

"This," said the counsel for the Crown, "is a painful case, and I shall be compelled to ask you some painful questions."

Mark inclined his head in assent to this and the examination-in-chief began. It took Mark back to the quarrel between the prisoner and his father, and led on past Mark's adoption by Mr. Carroll to the great libel case. Then it became more direct and particular.

"You recollect the night of the 29th September last?"

"Vividly," said Mark.

"Kindly relate what happened."

Mark had received from the prisoner a letter (produced) asking for money, and begging that it might be brought to an hotel in the town. Having reason to suspect the prisoner's purpose, he did not go. Thereupon the prisoner came to Overhill, and was there encountered, accidentally, by the witness. A conversation took place between them, in the course of which Mark felt it his duty to exhort the prisoner to an amended way of life. He promised in view of such an amendment as he prayed for to use his best efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the prisoner and his father, though he admitted he did not think the task a hopeful one. The prisoner charged him excitedly with having poisoned his father's mind against him, and attempted to strike him across

the face with the walking-stick he carried. The witness declared that he had defended himself as well as he could, but, being at length partially stunned by a heavy blow on the head, and thereby felled to the ground, was savagely beaten as he lay. Finally, he declared that when the prisoner's walking-stick was broken by the violence of his blows, and he, the witness, was struggling to his feet, the prisoner drew a dagger from his breast pocket. A struggle ensued, in which witness was powerless to avert the prisoner's intent. In the course of that struggle he asked, "Do you mean to kill me, Tom?" and the prisoner answered, "By God, I do!" Witness was then stabbed, and lost consciousness.

The thing was as plain as a pike-staff, and when the counsel for the Crown resumed his seat the jury in their own minds had found the prisoner guilty. But now arose the counsel for the defence, and hitching his gown and playing with the papers on the table, looked suavely for a minute at the witness and began:

"When did it first enter your mind, Mr. Carroll, to bring this charge against your cousin?"

"Not," said Mark, "until the medical men pronounced me out of danger."

"What was the reason of that delay?"

"I thought, sir," Mark answered, with a certain reluctant magnanimity, "that my uncle—the prisoner's father—had endured enough already."

"You wished that the prisoner should escape punishment?"

"That was partly my reason for silence."

"That was partly your reason. Let us know it all, if you please."

"If I had died, sir," said Mark gravely and gently, with downcast eyes, "the prisoner's position would have been different. I was silent, not from consideration for him so much as for his father."

"Do you know, Mr. Carroll, that you stand here in a singularly favourite light in consequence of that statement?"

"I know nothing of that," said Mark, simply. "I acted for the best."

"I am sure you did," returned the counsel, warmly.

The listeners wondered for the most part, but the judge and one or two of counsel's intimates, who knew his ways, began to look for something to arise from all this sympathetic suavity.

"Can you guess, Mr. Carroll," he began, after a little pause, "how much you owe the prisoner in money?" Mark looked inquiry. "Before your uncle dismissed the prisoner from his confidence and adopted you, how much money had you borrowed from him?"

"From the prisoner?" said Mark. "Several hundred pounds, I believe."

"Until he himself became impoverished, and whilst you were poor, he was uniformly generous to you, I believe?"

"He was," said Mark, "uniformly generous."

"Did you offer to repay him when he applied to you?"

"I was perfectly ready to repay him," returned Mark. "That question did not arise."

"Oh!" said counsel. "What was the purport of his visit to you?"

"The result proved the purport," answered Mark.

"Then your cousin came down to Overhill prepared to make a murderous assault upon you?"

"I am forced to believe so."

"What was his motive for that?"

"He appeared to conceive that I had purposely supplanted him in his father's affections."

"Was there—is there any truth in that belief?"

"None whatever."

"You have not made it a systematic practice to blacken your cousin's character for your own gain?"

"I have not. On the contrary, I have made excuses for him."

"When he needed none," said counsel. "A most efficient mode of libel."

This was the first thrust he gave, and Mark stood a little discomfited at its suddenness and keenness. Not that the discomfiture showed even for a moment.

"I am assuming motives, Mr. Carroll," the counsel continued, "and that is a thing I have no right to do. But now I must ask you one or two questions to which I must invite your particular attention. You know the Signora Malfi?"

"I have met her."

"Is this a recognisable portrait of that lady? Pray look at it carefully."

"It is, to the best of my remembrance, a portrait of the lady."

"Was Signora Malfi in the village of Overhill on the 29th September last?"

There was nothing but destruction to be got by denying this—little enough to be lost if he confessed it. Besides, Leggatt, the station-master, had sworn to his meeting her.

"I met her there."

"Kindly tell us what her business was."

"So far as she let me know it, she was there in search of a gentleman who, according to her statement, had wronged her."

"Who was that gentleman?"

"I am not responsible for these questions," said Mark. "I will answer if you press me."

"Who was that gentleman?"

"The prisoner."

"Were you anxious to spare him that revelation?"

"I was anxious to avoid the publication of a new scandal."

"Was that why you volunteered the statement to Leggatt, the station-master?"

"I offered that statement in self-defence."

"Signora Malfi was never your mistress, Mr. Carroll?"

"Never."

"Do you know why she parted from her husband?"

"I did not even know that she was married." Mark had no sooner said this than he saw the folly of it, and hastened to qualify it: "I know that she lived with an operatic tenor who bore

the name of Malfi; but I am informed that they were never married."

"Married or not married, do you know why they parted?"

"I do not."

"Brother Crawford," said the judge, "I presume that all this is germane to the case?"

"Absolutely, my lord. Attend Mr. Carroll. Did Signor Malfi ever visit your chambers in the Temple to search for this lady?"

"He did," answered Mark. "I threw my rooms open to him. He examined them all, and went away again."

"The lady was not there?"

"The lady was not there."

"Upon your oath?"

"Upon my oath."

"You did not conceal her in the adjoining set of chambers? Come, Mr. Carroll, courage is a good thing in its way, but I'm not questioning in the dark."

"I am here to answer any questions you may put to me," Mark answered. Cool as he was, his head began to whirl, and the palms of his hands grew moist. Had they caught the Signora and forced her to confess? He dismissed that awful fancy as pure nonsense; but why did the man hang round about her name in this way?

"Did you conceal her in an adjoining set of chambers during Signor Malfi's visit?"

"I did not."

"Did you afterwards contemptuously dismiss

her, saying that she had been an agreeable toy to you, but that you did not care to have an Italian dagger in your ribs for her sake?"

"Nothing of the sort took place."

"Did you ever profess any attachment for her?"

"Never."

"Now, was it yourself and not your cousin whom she came to see at Overhill?"

"She told me she was seeking for my cousin."

"After your cousin had broken his walking-cane over you, did you meet the lady by appointment previously made?"

"No."

"Did she tell you that she had been witness to the well-merited thrashing you had received?"

"All this," said Mark, desperately, "is pure fabrication."

"Did she upbraid you with your own broken promises to her?"

"No such interview took place."

"Did she finally stab you in answer to an opprobrious epithet from your lips?"

"The prisoner stabbed me."

"Were you afraid to reveal the criminal, because the reason for her crime would have blotted your own reputation?"

"There is no truth in any of these guesses." The awful fancy dismissed five minutes ago as pure nonsense was here again, but to go back was impossible. Perhaps Tom had seen the thing done. This reflection was a great relief, for the prisoner's mouth was closed by law. That was

the evident truth of the case. Tom had seen it all, and had supplied his counsel with the truth, but without corroborative evidence his tale was worthless. From that moment Mark felt safe.

"Did you finally resolve to prefer the charge against your cousin to be revenged for the thrashing he had given you?"

"I preferred the charge with reluctance—great reluctance. I was moved to it by no sentiment of revenge."

"You were perfectly in the possession of your faculties when the blow was struck?"

"Perfectly."

"I will give you a chance to shelter yourself yet. There was no possibility of any hallucination in your mind at that moment?"

"None."

"You swear solemnly that your cousin, Thomas Carroll, struck the blow with that dagger which was afterwards found in your body?"

"I swear that."

"You swear that no interview took place between Caterina Malfi and yourself that evening?"

"I swear that."

The counsel resumed his seat, the barrister who acted for the Crown waved a hand of dismissal to the prosecutor, and arose murmuring:—

"Case for prosecution is completed, my lord."

Before Mark had left the box Crawford was on his feet again. His eyes flashed and his voice rang like a trumpet.

"Call Caterina Malfi."

One Cohen, eagle-beaked and eagle-eyed, rose

from his seat in the court at this cry, and made a gesture. All the court rose with him, and there was heard a murmur of amazement. Baretti cast one glance of triumphant hate at Mark, and a second later waved his hand with a swift and vivid gesture at the prisoner. Mark clutching the rail of the witness-box turned white, and a sickly tremor shook him with an anguish so terrible that even in that moment his villainies were punished.

The crowd to the left rear of the dock parted slowly, and a face took every eye and held it. Pale lips, tight-clenched swarthy cheeks without one touch of red, great black eyes blazing with inward fire, nostrils dilating and contracting. Revenge in person.

Mark fell rather than walked out of the witness-box. In full possession of his physical strength he could have borne this better, but he was only a week or two from his sick bed, and the tremendous shock unmanned him. Caterina saw him, and before Mark disappeared from the box their eyes met. He knew long since that he had no hope of mercy in her if she could take him once upon the hip, but he had always laughed at her. He knew now that he had nothing to hope from any fear in her. She would have walked to certain death to ruin him, and he could read that in her look.

The wave of faces in the court subsided and settled down to its old level. The Signora stood in the box, the sworn interpreter of the court was summoned, the oath was administered, and the counsel for the defence confronted the witness.

"What is your name?"

"Caterina Torriani."

"Not Malfi?"

"No."

"You remember the night of the 29th of September last?"

"Yes."

"Where were you on that night?"

"At a place called Overhill."

"For what purpose were you there?"

"I was there to be revenged upon Mark Carroll."

"For what?"

"We met," said the Signora, "nearly two years ago." And from that beginning she told her story. Sentence by sentence the sworn interpreter of the court turned it into dull English, which made it none the less terrible in the telling. The silence of the place was marvellous, until she related how Mark once upon a time had brought his cousin with him as a blind for Malfi, and then a murmur ran round the court and died. She went on calmly—with both hands clenched tightly upon her bosom—in a voice which never faltered and with a face which never changed, until she reached the scene at Overhill. Then once or twice she paused, and in spite of her restraining hands her bosom rose and fell like a wave. Her speech was made the slower by the fact that the judge took a full note of it, the interpreter waiting with one hand raised towards her and his eye upon the judge, until each sentence was written. When the pen stopped the interpreter

looked towards her, and she let fall another sentence.

"I had made up my mind to kill him."

Pause and dead silence, broken only by the scratching of the judge's quill. "But I loved him, and had to wait until he provoked me. I begged him to remember his old promises. He jeered at me. At last he called me——"

"What did he call you?"

One swift wave of crimson passed over her face and left her pale again. She spoke the word.

"Insulting epithet, my lord," said the interpreter. "Equivalent to street-walker."

"What happened then?"

"I had my dagger ready and I stabbed him."

"What is your object in coming here?"

"To ruin him."

"Do you know the consequences of this act to yourself?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that you are liable to imprisonment for life?"

"Yes."

"And you surrender yourself to justice?"

"Yes."

"That is the case for the defence, my lord."

"My lord," cried the foreman of the jury, "I beg to call your attention to the fact that the prosecutor has left the court."

"I have to ask for an authority for Mark Carroll's arrest on a charge of wilful and corrupt perjury," said Crawford, rising again.

"Certainly," said the judge, as if the thing were a matter of every day.

"My lord," said the foreman, rising a second time, "we are ready with our verdict."

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury?" began the clerk of arraigns, and on the heels of his mumbled "Guilty or Not Guilty?" the foreman rapped out:—

"Not Guilty!"

The court was filled with the noise of unrestrained applause, as Baretti struggled to the dock and clasped Tom's hands across the rail. A minute later the door of the dock was unbarred, and the fiery Italian's arms were about his friend's neck, and the little man was crying passionately.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Mark slipped out of court it was nobody's business to stop him. A quarter of an hour later he would have been hustled and roughly treated, but so far nothing had occurred to awaken popular anger. Amazement there was in plenty, and expectation in plenty, but as yet no rage. So he walked out quietly, unmolested.

As he stood upon the outer steps of the building he felt suddenly fugitive and outcast. There was not a hope he had had in the world, but that morning's work had wrecked it.

"I must bolt," he said to himself, "and that right early." His shoulder was sensitive to a phan-

tom hand which might at any moment become real. He walked in apparent quiet down the steps, and for a hundred yards or so along the street. Turning then into a by-way, he encountered the vehicle which had carried him from the railway station to the court.

"If you're not engaged," he said to the driver, "I should like a little drive into the country. I want a breath of fresh air after that crowded court."

"Yes, sir," said the man, "which way?"

"Out here will do," said Mark, and entered the coach. The man turned the horse's head and drove off at a stolid jog-trot. "I am not learned in the laws of this cursed country," said the fare to himself, "though I *was* bred to the Bar, but I suppose they'll want me at once." He lit a cigar and leaned back out of observation's way, trying to think. He cursed Tom, the Signora, his uncle's money, himself, and whatever else he thought of. He saw already how powerless he was to defy the terror he himself had raised. To have stayed behind and contemptuously to have denied the Signora's story, would not that have been wiser than to have run away at once? He could drive back still. No! He was too late. He should have thought of that at first. To have left the court on her appearance was damnatory. A charge of perjury against himself—a counter charge of perjury against Caterina—a charge of conspiracy against her and Tom and Baretti—Baretti was in the swim, as his face of triumph made manifest. All this would have given time to run away at ease. His thoughts travelled in irregular circles like a straw in an

eddy. But with every whirl they gave, he remembered one thing—he was ruined.

Mark's opinion used to be that he had never been a fool except in a way in which it is permitted even to wise men to infringe on the domain of folly, but now it began to occur to him that he had been a fool at large; an uncomfortable reflection. You cannot reconstruct a life's philosophy in a minute, but Mark's tablets of commandment were smashed to pieces, and he was already prowling amid the shards to hunt up material for a new version. Logically, his old post of Cynic and Self-lover was as tenable as ever; but it was Fate who had dislodged him, and she will not be reasoned with. What if honesty were the best policy after all? If there were something in human affairs, or outside them, which made it impossible for a man successfully to defy certain recognised rules? When Mark had been lying between life and death doubts of a similar nature had occurred to him. Now that he was ruined, and his schemes were broken and his enemies triumphant, the doubts came back again. The gambler has no suspicion of his infallible system whilst he wins, but when the tide of fortune turns against it, he begins to suspect its virtues. And the system should be above suspicion when you stake your immortal soul and mortal welfare.

He tried to keep his head clear of these fancies, and to get an unobstructed view of the situation as it concerned himself. To kill Tom or Caterina, or both of them, would have been pleasurable, he thought, but he had still self-pos-

session enough to smile at that as a longing after the unattainable. Besides, Mark was not a good hater. His blood was cold. He despised better than he hated; and now, at least, the one thing he had to do was to steer clear of immediate dangers. Suddenly he remembered the papers entrusted to him that morning by his uncle, and he began to examine them anew. They made a somewhat bulky little parcel for an inner pocket, even folded in the most convenient way, and a hasty observation showed him that they were mainly worthless to him, though of value to his uncle. There were two hundred and fifty pounds in notes, and there was a cheque made payable to Thomas Carroll by one Septimus Hardwicke for twelve hundred and thirteen pounds, and countersigned by the said Thomas Carroll. This cheque, as Mark knew, was given in payment for a strip of building land. If he dare go back to the town and present himself at the bank, he knew very well that he could have it cashed at once. Fourteen hundred and sixty-three pounds was enough to start the world with. If he had so much saved out of the fire he might begin to think himself fortunate, after all. He put his head through the window of the four-wheeler, and addressed the driver:—

“I think you may as well turn back now.” But his heart failed him even as he spoke. “Never mind. Drive on a bit further. Isn’t there a country hotel out this way?”

“Fox and Hounds, sir,” said cabby. “Two mile further on, sir.”

"All right," returned Mark. "Drive me there." Cabby touched up the horse again and away they went. "Was there ever," Mark asked himself, "such infernal luck as mine? What an ass I am. Why didn't I drive straight to the bank after leaving that confounded court? As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. Perjury followed by fraudulent bailee. By God, Mark, you're a pretty fellow, and a very pretty reputation you'll leave behind you."

No pretence of not caring was likely to avail him much, and by-and-by he lay back in a sullen desperation, through which a fit of cursing broke now and again, as some nasty creature breaks now and then the surface of a sewer steam. His cogitations came in effect to this that he was played out, exposed, and (most likely) at that moment, hunted. His enemies would burn to get hold of him, and the one good turn he had it in his power to do himself was to let them burn in vain. It would probably take him all he knew to get away.

He began to grow cool again, and his cunning awoke his fears. He thought of everything that safety could possibly hang upon. The driver pulled up at the Fox and Hounds and he found that the landlord knew him, though he had been there for years and years. He called for a glass of brandy, gave the driver his choice of drinks, and said that he would stretch his legs by a little walk.

"You can get something to eat, driver," he said carelessly tossing half-a-sovereign to the man. "We'll see about the change when I get back

again. You can give the horse a mouthful of hay, too. Be ready to start in an hour."

Mark lit a cigar, and walked along the country road. If ever he had known this district he had forgotten it, and knew nothing more than that it took him from the scene of his disaster.

"I'd better have stuck to her," he thought, as the Signora came into his mind. "She must have been damnably fond of me to turn round like that."

He walked on for a long time until he came to a country railway-station near a level crossing. The time-table pasted against a board at the station wall was consulted, and he learned by reference to his watch that a train started in half an hour. He chose some inconsiderable place to ask a ticket for, and in due time was carried thither. Arrived, he went with simulated bustle to the hotel, gave a fictitious name and address at the bar, and requested that certain packages should be preserved for him when they arrived. Then, over a glass of brandy and water in the parlour, he looked at a Gazetteer and found out where he was. This done he called for a fly to a neighbouring village, the very name of which had until then been strange to him, and reaching it after four or five miles' drive, paid the fly and dined, and studied the local Gazetteer anew.

"If they follow me now, they will find a check here and there," he said to himself, "and I must have an hour or two before they get on the scent at all. Nothing so wide and safe as London."

Dinner over, he entered into affable conversation with the host.

"You can let me have a bed here to-night, landlord?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I haven't any luggage with me," said Mark, "so I'll pay you beforehand. How much?"

"Eighteen-pence, sir."

"Great changes here since I used to know the place," said Mark. The Gazetteer had primed him.

"Ay, sir?" said the landlord. "As how?"

"Oh, I don't mean the village, but the neighbourhood. Finding coal at Lecky, for instance, and running the railway through Welton."

"Yes, sir," said the landlord. "Great changes."

"Let me see," said Mark, "Welton's out that way, isn't it?"

"Lord bless you, no sir," answered the landlord, pointing out the way directly opposite, "that's the Welton Road. Past the church out there, sir, and then it lies due west. At this time o' year the sun sets over Welton from here."

"Odd how a man forgets places," said Mark, and fresh from his study of the Gazetteer, he asked a question or two and made a statement or two, to all of which the landlord answered willingly enough.

The fugitive had paid for his dinner as well as his bed, and when the evening dusk came on, he bought a cigar at the bar, and again announced his intention of stretching his legs. They had

been pretty well stretched already, and he was beginning to feel tired.

"If by any miracle they should follow me so far as this to-night," he thought, as he strolled along the village street, "they will rely upon my coming back to bed there. "It's likely enough that I am piling up more precautions than I need, but there's no knowing, and I am not going to throw a chance away."

He walked on doggedly to Welton, and there found himself at a branch station of the Great Western Railway. He booked for Oxford and slept there. In the morning he bought a second-hand portmanteau—a new one looked suspicious to his eyes—and having provided himself with a few necessaries, he studied the hotel Bradshaw carefully, and selected a roundabout route for London. At the railway station he saw "The Carroll Case. Extraordinary Revelations. Scene in Court," on one newspaper bill; and on another "Melodrama in High Life. Carroll Stabbing Case. Startling Evidence." He crowded the great Eastern Question out of the bills, and he knew that for one day at least he was the best advertised man in Europe.

He bought the journals and took his place in a first-class carriage. He read the account of yesterday's doings in three or four different forms, and he listened behind the sheet whilst his fellow travellers talked of him. Each of the papers had a leading article upon him, and he was as famous as Gladstone or Bismarck. "Phenomenal vengeance" on the part of Caterina, "phenomenal

wickedness" on the part of Mark Carroll, "extraordinary escape" of Tom Carroll from the snares spread for him by the phenomenal cousin. The writers of the daily press had not often met with such a theme, wide as is the field they hunt in, and rich as it is in surprising incident. Crimes in plenty they confessed they knew—criminals were, unhappily, as plentiful as blackberries: but crimes and criminals of this amazing stamp were rare. Thus Mark had such a chance as rarely falls to the lot of any man of seeing himself as other people saw him. All the writers were duly cautious, too, and qualified themselves with suppositions. "If the evidence of this woman can be accepted"—"If we may argue from the sudden disappearance of the prosecutor"—and so on. Mark saw how little these reservations were needed, but he was behind the scenes. In the railway carriage everybody denounced him in terms so unmeasured that a downright terror began to assail him. If he were seen and recognised by any chance acquaintance, a mob might tear him into pieces. He began to see that murder would have made him less odious in the general mind.

By the route he had chosen it took him nearly the whole day to reach London, and he passed every hour in fear, and in a grim defiance of his own tremors. He entered London by the Surrey side, and dined at an ill-provided restaurant in company with an evening paper. He learned from its columns all that had been done in the search after himself, and he read once more the translation of Caterina's evidence. He discovered

that the flyman had not returned until late at night, and that then, learning the truth, he had volunteered a statement to the police, who had traced the fugitive as far as Welton, from which place he was believed to have taken a ticket to Oxford. He put down the paper and forced himself to eat a few morsels of food, but the news-sheet drew his eyes by a sort of fascination, and he read on. The amount of money and money's value with which he had been entrusted on the morning of the trial was set down, and the very number of the notes he carried. He was alone in the restaurant, and, with a furtive look round the place, he drew his pocket-book from his breast—the heavier papers were stowed away in the portmanteau at his feet—and by a glance at the notes verified the reporter's statement.

At that moment the door opened, and whilst he somewhat flurriedly put back the flimsy papers, there entered from the street a stout and personable man with a white tie, a hat modelled on the lines of the head-dress worn by Bishops, and a smile in which the most careless passer-by might read humility and benevolence. The new comer gave a start on seeing Mark, and Mark looked at him with a face that had suddenly grown ghastly. Humility and benevolence vanished from the stout man's face, and he marched forward after a second's hesitation, and held out his hand.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Warner."

Mark took the proffered hand, but his own lay in it cold as death.

"I do not think," said the stout man, "that anything in the world could have afforded me so much pleasure as this unexpected interview. I use this little house regularly, Mr. Warner, but I never expected that I should see you within these humble precincts. I should suppose it to be worth two or three thousand pounds to me to meet you here at this interesting juncture."

"Not quite as much as that, Bethesda," said Mark, recovering a little. "Rather than pay so much as that for so cheap a pleasure, I would blow your brains out to begin with and follow with my own."

Mr. Bethesda applied his hand to a gong which lay upon the table, and a dirty waiter answering this summons, the good man called for a cup of chocolate. When the waiter had supplied this he lingered, and Bethesda stirred the contents of the cup with his spoon, and took an occasional sip at it and an occasional look at Mark, who by this time had got his bank notes back into his pocket and was looking blindly at the newspaper.

"Waiter," said Mr. Bethesda, calmly and blandly, "get me a hansom cab in five minutes' time, if you please. Just look outside and stop the first that passes."

"Might look for a week," said the waiter, "and not see a hansom go by here, sir."

"A four-wheeler will do," replied Bethesda. The waiter sauntered to the door. "I shall be glad to see you beneath my humble roof, Mr. Warner," said the good man, when he and Mark were thus left alone again.

"I am obliged to you," said Mark, sardonically.

After this Mr. Bethesda held his peace until the waiter announced the discovery and arrest of a four-wheeled cab, when he disbursed his two-pence, gave the man a halfpenny, and stood by whilst Mark paid for his own miserable and scarcely-tasted meal. Then the good man begged leave to help Mark with his portmanteau, and walked behind him stealthily, like a fat cat with a rat in custody. Mark entered the vehicle first, Mr. Bethesda having instructed the driver, followed, and the two facing each other were driven through the streets together. Mark leaning back scanned his companion's countenance furtively, and once or twice encountered his smiling look.

The journey was not a long one, but it gave Mark time to turn himself round in.

"Is this your house, Bethesda?" he asked, when the cab stopped. "Are you married or single? I forget."

"I am a single man," said Bethesda, who at that moment was leaning forward to open the cab door, so that his face was brought near to Mark's. "I am a single man at present, Mr. Warner, but I do not live alone." He smiled as he said this, not quite so amiably as usual, and Mark's eyes glittered wickedly. When they alighted, Mr. Bethesda, keeping an eye on his companion, proceeded to unlock the door, and fumbled so much with the key that Mark lost patience, and taking it irritably from his fingers, turned it in the lock and flung the door open. The passage on which they entered was dusk, and Mr. Bethesda

stood in the doorway whilst he called for a light. In point of fact, Mr. Bethesda's prisoner was growing more resolute and assured in manner, and Mr. Bethesda himself was becoming a little timorous. Mark observed the change in his captor's manner, and was quick to take advantage of it.

"Don't stand there like an ass," he said, quietly. "Come indoors. It isn't worth my while to commit murder yet."

Notwithstanding this assurance, Mr. Bethesda forbore to close the door, but waited until a maid servant appeared from the lower part of the house with a candle. Then he not merely closed the door, but bolted it at top and bottom. He also locked it with a big inside key, which he withdrew from the lock and handed to the servant.

"Take care of that until I ask for it," he said. The girl stared from him to the key and from the key to him, but said nothing. "You may light the gas in the back room, Eliza. Thank you. Now you may go. You may save yourself the trouble of looking through the keyhole, Eliza," he added, as the girl retired, "because I shall be opening the door pretty constantly at unexpected moments."

"Now we can talk to each other," said Mark. "We may as well have our explanation at once."

"Precisely," said Bethesda. For a full minute there was silence, each waiting for the other to begin. Bethesda's patience gave way first. "I am very glad to see you here, Mr. Warner, because you bled me pretty freely once upon a time, and I am not so wealthy as I was. You are in

possession of a decent sum of money now, according to the newspapers, and I rather fancy you are in a position to repay me."

"In plain English, Bethesda," said Mark, "you think I am in your hands, and that you can do what you like with me?"

"Precisely," said Bethesda.

"It was necessary that we should come to an understanding, since chance threw us together," Mark began, "and we can arrive at it more comfortably here than elsewhere. When we have arrived at our understanding, you will see under what an error you brought me here. You have read the great Carroll case in the newspapers, no doubt?"

"I thought I had told you so," returned Bethesda.

"I have made a mistake, Bethesda," Mark went on, "which any man might have made, and it proved fatal to my plans. It not only proved fatal to my plans, but it set me in a very awkward corner, and exposed me to popular prejudice. Now, trading on my knowledge of that popular prejudice, you think to frighten me. If your own hands were clean, Bethesda, you might do it. But we are blackguards both, and if you threaten to expose me, I threaten to expose you. We are pot and kettle, Bethesda."

"Don't be too certain of your own position, sir," cried Bethesda. "To tell you the truth, sir, I do not believe that any man has been so unpopular as you are for many years. The tide of public feeling has set in against you very strongly

—very strongly, sir. Do you know Mr. Baretti? Mr. Baretti is a gentleman whom I met at the Garrick during the period of my management for Mr. Carroll. He is a very ardent friend of your cousin's, and he has issued a document on his own account, sir. I have possessed myself of a copy, which you may read if you choose."

So saying, Bethesda took from his breast a pocket-book which he opened with great deliberation. Mark looked hard at him all the while, and by-and-by took from his outstretched hand a small placard announcing briefly that the sum of two hundred pounds would be paid by Antonio Baretti, of Number Twenty, Montague Gardens, West, to any person who would give such information as would lead to the arrest of Mark Carroll, late of Overhill, in the county of Worcester.

"I suppose," said Bethesda, in a contemplative way, "that there can't be less than ten thousand of 'em up and down London at this minute."

"Ah!" returned Mark, producing his cigar case, and tearing the handbill into spills, one of which he lighted at the gas. "And you think I'm fool enough to buy you off with all these out against me. You're quite mistaken, Bethesda. The Customs authorities would love to know you, and I promise you that if you denounce me I'll denounce you. Why, hang it all, man, I thought you had more sense than to try to bully me, with such a record as your own behind you."

Mr. Bethesda looked crestfallen.

"You are too many for me, Mr. Warner," he made answer in a little while. "You always were."

"Now, mark me," said Mark, inspecting his cigar critically to see that it was properly alight; "your safety is bound up in mine. If I am caught that is your misfortune, whether it is your fault or not; for I am no sooner collared than I mention the name of my friend Mr. Bethesda. Now in place of bullying me, don't you see that it's in your interest to see me away. I think if you'll look at it long enough you'll see it in that light. Take time. When I see two ways before me, Bethesda, one a bold way and the other a cowardly, I take the bold one, especially when I'm playing with a man like you. Nobody will be likely to look here for me. You can put me up here until you have made arrangements with one of your riverside friends. How far is the river away from here, Bethesda? Not far, I fancy."

"There's a bit of an old wharf at the bottom of the garden, Sir," said Bethesda humbly.

"That is very convenient indeed," returned Mark. "Perhaps there is a bit of an old boat at the bit of an old wharf? Eh, Bethesda?" Mr. Bethesda returned no answer. "If you have no objection we'll go and see. Perhaps you know an old friend who can take care of me and get me down river without the formality of taking a ticket for me. I am not particular as to how I go. You see, Bethesda, I am a man who has mixed a good deal in all sorts of society, high and low, and there are a good many people who know me. In the circumstances which at present surround me, I am

safer out of England than in it, and I take it as a great kindness on your part that you turned up in such a friendly way at so difficult a juncture."

"You are too many for me, Mr. Warner," said Mr. Bethesda. "You always were."

"Observe, Bethesda," said Mark, "the advantages of a moral life. Let this lesson sink deep into your mind, and persuade you to loftier courses for the future. If you had never let me find you out you might have earned two hundred pounds at this moment by a turn of a hand."

"I have had nothing to do in that sort of way, Sir," said Bethesda, mysteriously, "for some years past, and I'm afraid I can't be of any service to you."

"All right, Bethesda," returned the visitor, "I am in your hands. If I am caught, whether by your instrumentation or not, I shall tell what I know. And I know a good deal. I can prove half a dozen cases against you, and you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. Your safety hangs on mine."

"I will do what I can, Sir," returned Bethesda. "You are too many for me. You always were."

CHAPTER XIII.

BARETTI, in the sight of all the court, kissed Tom on both cheeks, Italian fashion, twice over. The crowd there assembled guffawed at this unaccustomed spectacle, and some clapped hands

at it. Public attention was for the time being concentrated on the released prisoner. He was local, and everybody knew him or knew of him. That gave a livelier interest to him, and had he been sentenced to a life's hard labour, it would have been more piquant to watch him than to have watched a stranger, whilst his deliverance was naturally more romantic than that of a stranger could have been. That which is nearest us touches us most.

Tom had never greatly courted public notice in this way, though he had been honestly ambitious of it in another, and so soon as Baretti could be brought to reason he persuaded him to leave the court. The approaches were crowded, and the dock official leaned over and touched his late charge on the shoulder.

"You can come this way if you like, Sir," he said. "You can get out quieter."

Tom and Baretti slipped into the dock, and passing down a flight of stairs found themselves by-and-by in a flagged courtyard, where a little bustle was going on. One blue-coated official was running across the yard with a carafe of water and a glass, and another was kneeling and fanning with a sheet of the *Times* at a recumbent figure in a corner. An old woman of the rural middle-class was crying incoherently and wringing her hands above the recumbent figure. Tom knew this old woman, whose husband had at one time held a farm under Carroll senior, and he was crossing over towards her when an official met him with his hat.

"What is the matter?" asked Tom.

"Lady fainted in court, sir," said the man civilly. "She's realeted somehow to our superintendent, and he had her brought down here where it's quiet."

Tom took another step forward, and to his amazement recognised the prone figure as that of Azubah Moore. He made no ado about the matter, but seeing at a glance that the attendants were all helpless, he walked into the corner and assumed the direction of affairs. By-and-by the patient, who was wofully pale, began to sigh and moan a little, and then her cheeks began to gather colour. In a while she opened her eyes, and seeing Tom Carroll above her, looked at him with a calm, abstracted contentment for half a minute, then suddenly coloured from the roots of her hair to the throat, hid her face with her hands, and tried to gain her feet.

"Lie still for a while, Miss Moore," said Tom.

"Yes, do, there's a deary, lie still as the gentleman says, my love," gabbled the useless old lady; but the girl was conscious now (as any girl would have been in the circumstances) of the disorder of her dress and attitude, and her one desire was to hide herself. A minute later she was afoot and clinging to the old lady's arm. Then the superintendent, her relative, abandoned the *Times*, and lending his assistance got the girl and the old lady both into his private apartments.

Some of the officials came up and congratulated Tom on his escape, and he thanked them, and with Baretti moved off into the street, where

knots of people ran before him to cheer him, or interrupted him to shake hands with him, until he reached Baretti's hotel and was hidden from the sight of the throng.

"Carroll," said Barretti, marching up and down the sitting-room he had engaged before hand for his friend's privacy, "there is a God in heaven. It is not permitted in this world for a man to be a villain without suffering for it, and His hand is over the innocent."

"Poor Mark!" said Tom.

"You mean that?" cried Barretti, half wildly.

"Yes," said Tom. "I mean it."

"You pity him?"

"Why not?" Tom asked. "I knew him when he was a lad, and loved him for years. I never did him an ill turn in my life. From the time of our going to London I was his best friend."

"Are these your reasons for pitying him?" asked Barretti scornfully.

"Why not?" asked Tom again.

"Would you let him go scot-free if you had him in your hands now?" The painter was on the edge of despising his friend.

"Scot-free?" asked Tom. "What do you call scot-free? He has sold everything he had in the world and has bought remorse and shame with the proceeds of the sale. Pity him! I never heard anything so pitiful."

"You are a fool, Carroll," said Barretti, "and an angel." He laughed oddly and took a turn or two about the room, and pausing suddenly rang

the bell, and on the waiter's appearance demanded champagne. When the man had retired he took his friend by both hands. "You will go back to your father now?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, with an uncertain accent. "I shall wait until he sends for me. Poor old governor. This will hit him hard. Everybody will know of it—the country will ring with it. He will almost die of shame."

"I shall go and see him," said Baretti, decisively, after a moment's pause. "I shall tell him how wrong he has been from first to last, how much he has been deceived."

Tom made no answer to this, but the waiter returning a moment later with the wine, they drank to each other with a serious tenderness.

"Baretti," said Tom, somewhat suddenly, "did that Italian woman volunteer to come here, or was she forced to do it?" Baretti told the story of his interview with Caterina. "Wonderful," said Tom. "I could understand a sense of justice operating in such a case, but hate like that goes beyond me."

"I do not think anybody but a woman could hate so," Baretti answered. "I read your poets, and I believe in your Shakespeare: 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.'"

"What will happen to her?" asked Tom. "Crawford said she was liable to imprisonment for life."

"There are extenuating circumstances," returned Baretti, coolly. The Signora's probable fate did not seem greatly to affect him. "If I were judge,

I should remember what manner of man Mr. Mark Carroll has proved himself to be, and should pass a formal sentence."

"Do you think Mark hated me, Baretti?" asked Tom, after a pause. "Was it all cold-blooded, or had I made him hate me somehow?"

"My dear Carroll," said the painter, "you are a man of lofty genius, and you have a noble heart, but you do not understand human nature. You were in your cousin's way and he tried to put you out of it. That made him dislike you. Then you found him out, and thrashed him, and in common circumstances he would have allowed that to pass without disliking you much more for it, because he is a villain with a great deal of common sense. But when this woman stabbed him, he could not give the truth of the case, because he would have ruined himself with your father by doing so, and he saw a sudden way to get rid of you, who were likely to be dangerous to him, and, perhaps, it was a little pleasant to be able to strike you back again. Your cousin is not a common character, because he combines uncommon qualities of invention and courage with the common qualities of a rascal. By virtue of them he becomes great in degree, but you find the species to which he belongs in every street in London. He is an egotist. It is pleasant to me to think that he will suffer now in proportion to his egotism."

"Poor devil!" said Tom, half pitying, half contemptuous.

"Well," returned Baretti, nodding his head

with half a laugh, "I will hate him enough for two, my friend."

As they sat and talked over their wine, and afterwards at dinner, they made many guesses at fact and motive, but it is hardly worth while for us who know the story to follow their talk. But it is worth while to record the fact that when the news of Mark's escape reached Baretti, the little man, without a word to his friend, dashed out and saw the county inspector of police for a minute or two, and, as a result of the interview, laid in his hands a tenpound note and the written copy of that small handbill which Bethesda showed to the fugitive a little later on. Baretti was not only no longer poor, but was well on the road to wealth by this time. He was a fashionable portrait painter, and was neck deep in profitable commissions. Nowadays people with money are content to pay such prices for the counterfeit presentment of themselves on canvas that a painter in fashionable request makes more money than a prosperous merchant; and Baretti, if he had been so-minded, could have lived in the palace of which he had been used to dream in days when a palace to live in seemed a worthy object of ambition. Now he had nothing to be ambitious for, and he only worked out of a habit of industry. He lived on a twentieth part of his income, and stored up money without finding any particular satisfaction in it. His bowl of ministroni and his dish of macaroni and tomato made a dinner he would not have exchanged for all the luxuries of the best English table, and his quarter flask of Chianti was

wine enough for a day's drinking. In dress he was a rich and picturesque as the time would allow, but not extravagant, and he had no vices, so that now he had a command of money such as his old friend and patron had never enjoyed in his wealthiest days.

Tom, unconscious of Baretti's action, went up to London in the morning, and the painter stayed behind to interview the elder Carroll. He was disappointed, but not surprised, when Mr. Carroll declined to see him.

"Mr. Carroll says, sir," said the grave butler, "that he will be glad to receive, by letter, any communication you may have to make to him. He desires me, sir, to convey his compliments to you, and to ask you if you will take any refreshment."

"He is unwell?" said Baretti.

"Well, he says not, sir," returned the butler, "but he looks it. May I offer you luncheon, sir?"

Baretti thanked him, and walking down the avenue re-entered the fly which had carried him from the station, and drove back again. Leggatt, the station-master, recognised him, of course, and hovered about him in the hope of getting into conversation, but Baretti's no's and yes's froze him, and he withdrew. There was nothing to hold Baretti in the county town, and he returned to follow Tom to London, and arrived at home in the evening. He had something of a struggle within himself on leaving Overhill. He could see from the station the lofty trees which surrounded Lord-ing's house, and he would fain have called there,

but he was about his friend's business, and had been faithful so long that it had grown into a sort of habit with him.

When he reached town he gave Tom the result of his visit to Overhill, and both of them thought the signs encouraging. They sat talking until midnight, and had long ceased to expect a visitor, when the landlady tapped at the door, and announced that there was somebody below who wished to speak to Mr. Baretti. The painter ran downstairs in his dressing-gown and confronted in the hall a man of longshore aspect, who ducked and scraped at him grotesquely.

"What do you want?"

"I want to put this into your hands, sir," said the man, producing a visiting-card, and handing it to Baretti. The visiting-card bore the name of Mr. Bethesda and the words, scrawled in pencil, "Follow bearer. I have M. C." This was almost obliterated by friction in the waistcoat pocket of the messenger, and had evidently been written in great haste. Baretti stared at it doubtfully a moment and then made up his mind.

"Who gave you this?" he asked.

"Mr. Bethesda," said the longshore man.

"And where am I to follow you?"

"It's down Poplar way." The man was husky and smelt of rum, and altogether he was not an inviting companion for a journey—down Poplar way—to be begun at midnight.

"Come upstairs," said Baretti, and leading the way the man followed lumberingly, and stood ducking and making legs on the landing outside

Tom's room. "Come in," said the painter, and he entered, fingering his tarpaulin hat and moving his feet uneasily. "Carroll, look at this. 'M. C.' is understandable enough, eh?"

Tom glanced at the card and then looked up excitedly.

"Shall you go?"

"We had better go together," said Baretti. "Come here a moment." Tom followed him into the bedroom. "Is that Bethesda's handwriting?"

"I think so, but I am not sure."

"Have you arms of any sort?"

"Why?" asked Tom.

"Have you arms of any sort?"

"A revolver I used to practice with."

"Cartridges?"

"Yes."

"Load it and put it in your pocket. The whole thing may be a plot. You will come?"

"I will come; certainly."

Baretti emerged into the sitting-room, and having bade the man to wait there, he ran upstairs to put on boots, coat, and hat, and returning in two or three minutes found Tom already equipped. The painter as he entered the room played rather ostentatiously with a brightly-polished revolver, and looked the messenger in the face as he did so.

"'Scuse me, sir," said the man, hoarsely, "I hopes you know to 'andle that, sir." Baretti contented himself with a nod. "Cos," resumed the messenger, "if you don't you'll excuse me, sir, but

they're a ockard sort o'thing to play with. I should leave it behind if I was you."

"Thank you," returned Baretti, locking it and slipping it into his pocket. "I prefer to take it with me."

"Very well, sir," returned the messenger. "I'm a single man myself."

He shook his head rather doubtfully notwithstanding, and followed Baretti down the stairs with a hesitating step, whilst Tom brought up the rear. A four-wheeled cab stood at the door, and the man motioned them both towards it.

"Ride outside, Carroll," said Baretti in a whisper, "and keep your eyes open."

Tom climbed up beside the driver, and Baretti and the messenger entered.

"The man knows where to go?" asked Baretti.

"He knows where to go all right," responded the messenger, and lit a short clay pipe, whose ancient flavour compelled Baretti to smoke in self-defence. The journey was long, and, in spite of the surmises and expectations with which Baretti kept himself awake, dull and tedious. It had neither interruption nor adventure from beginning to end, and to both Baretti and Tom it seemed to have lasted a fortnight or thereabouts, when at last the grumbling vehicle pulled up at the end of a street from the top of which could be seen the dull gleam of the river and the lamps of one or two craft that lay afloat. Here the messenger alighted.

"It's nigh here," he said briefly. "You must let me go first."

A policeman strolled by and turned his light upon the party.

"Officer," said Baretti, "I am not sure that I shall not want you with me. Come this way." He slipped a few silver coins into the man's hand as he spoke. The policeman closed his bull's-eye with a snap and followed. The longshore man took no notice, but shambled down the narrow street towards the river. When he had passed a dozen houses he paused, and waved a backward hand at his followers. They stood still in obedience to this gesture, and he went on for perhaps twenty yards, when he turned and entered at a little archway at the bottom of a court. In two or three minutes he reappeared, and, in obedience to an onward wave of the hand, they followed him again. He led the way this time to the open door of a tumble-down and deserted-looking house, and entered with exaggerated creaking caution, and the three who followed caught his attempt at silence by sympathy, and went tiptoe after him. The passage they entered was pitch dark, but no sooner were they all within than a door opened at the side, and Mr. Bethesda appeared holding a rushlight in a ginger beer bottle. He nodded to Baretti, who came first, but looked disconcerted when he saw Tom and the officer.

"You may wait outside, policeman," he said. "Pray walk in, Mr. Baretti. Pray walk in, Mr. Carroll. Joe, you can wait outside with the officer."

Tom and Barette entered the sordid room, and Bethesda closed the door.

"Why did you send for me, Mr. Bethesda?" asked the painter.

"Well, sir," said Bethesda, respectfully and benevolently, "a copy of this little document fell into my hands to-day, and shortly afterwards I met Mr. Carroll. I am not averse to the receipt of two hundred pounds, and I requested Mr. Warner—I beg pardon, Mr. Carroll—to accompany me home. Mr. Carroll bargained for my assistance in quitting the country. Gentlemen, I can rely upon your honour; Mr. Warner knows something which it would be impolitic in me to make public just at present, and if I surrender him into your hands I must make a bargain that I receive the two hundred pounds before he is arrested."

"Who is Mr. Warner?" asked Barette, "and what has he to do with it?"

"I beg pardon, sir," said Bethesda, "I spoke through force of habit. Mr. Carroll was long known to me as Mr. Warner."

"I am afraid, Mr. Bethesda," said Barette, "that we shall have to trouble you to be a little more explicit. You know Mark Carroll's present whereabouts?"

"Yes, sir," said Bethesda respectfully wetting his thumb and finger and benevolently snuffing the rushlight.

"And you are prepared to surrender him to justice?"

"On condition, sir, of the immediate payment of the reward. Not that I doubt you, sir. It is

necessary for me to leave the country if Mr. Carroll is arrested."

"In short," said Barette, "he has a hold of some sort upon you. Are you and he partners in any villainy?"

"A little evasion of the Customs duties, sir," returned Bethesda. "Mr. Warner was aware—I beg your pardon, Mr. Carroll was aware—of some transactions of mine in respect to tobacco. He traded, I may say, upon that knowledge, and made considerable capital out of it. I have long ceased to have any connection with that traffic, but Mr. Carroll threatens, if he is taken, whether through my instrumentality or not, that he will denounce me, and therefore supposes that he has made me responsible for his safety. Now I am quite sure, gentlemen, that if I put you in the way of apprehending Mr. Carroll, that you will not interfere with my quitting the country."

"Do you suppose that I have brought two hundred pounds here with me to-night?" asked Barette.

Mr. Bethesda looked disappointed.

"If Mr. Thomas Carroll would undertake that it shall be paid to me by post," he said with deep respect, "I think I might accept that. I have means of slipping down the river, gentlemen, and the Hôtel Bristol at Boulogne will be my address in a day or two."

"But, Bethesda," said Tom with a look of some indignation and disgust, "you appear to forget that I entrusted you with a considerable amount

of property for sale, and that you have not yet accounted to me for it."

"The property, sir," returned Bethesda, "remains unsold. That is a fact which you may verify to-morrow, and if my statement should prove untrue, I could not ask you to complete your bond."

"You will trust Mr. Carroll's assurance?" asked Baretti.

"Implicitly, sir," returned Bethesda.

"I thought it was a motto with a rogue to trust nobody?"

"I am not a rogue, sir," said Bethesda humbly.

"About that," said Baretti, "there may be two opinions. But, Carroll, we have our man, or so it seems. Give Bethesda the promise."

"It goes against the grain with me," said Tom. "I had rather let him go."

"I will not let him go," replied Baretti grimly. "Mr. Bethesda, surrender this man to me, and you shall have your money remitted where you will."

"I beg your pardon, sir," returned Bethesda. "I have not the knowledge of you that I have of Mr. Carroll. If Mr. Carroll promises it shall be sent, I can go away contented."

"I can have nothing to do with it," cried Tom. "I will not make a bargain with one scoundrel to catch another."

Bethesda shrugged his shoulders slightly, as if to protest against this summary judgment of himself. Baretti turned away indignantly.

"If you will wait until to-morrow I will give you my cheque for the money, and you can cash it and go where you will "

"No, sir," said Bethesda, firmly. "If Mr. Warner—Mr. Carroll blows the gaff whilst I am in England I am not safe. They have noosed me already more than once. I can't risk it."

"Will you take my written pledge to forward the money?" demanded Baretti.

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bethesda, "but I couldn't get back here to enforce it. I shall be denounced, sir, directly Mr. Carroll reaches the police-station. I have never infringed the moral law," he added with an air of piety, "but I have broken the arbitrary provisions of my country's rulers, and if I am mentioned I am no longer safe."

"Very well, Mr. Bethesda," said Baretti; "if that is the case, unless you give me the information I require, I shall find myself compelled to abuse your admirable candour by calling in the officer outside."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Bethesda responded. "I will rely upon your honour. If you will come this way, gentlemen. Mr. Carroll must already be anxious about me."

He led the way from the house, and Baretti gave a signal to the officer to follow.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was a misty light in the court as Bethesda led the way across it, and one or two stars were struggling to be seen through the grey clouds which overcast the sky. A moist wind blew up from the river, and a dreary cry sailed over the water from a barge on the farther side. It was after two o'clock in the morning, and everything looked waste, and dark, and cold. Tom's quick sympathy found all this match well with his conception of cousin Mark's inward state, and he had no hunger to be revenged on one whose crimes had already made him so forlorn,

At the exit from the court Bethesda paused and addressed his followers in a whisper.

"It's the last house on the left—by the river. It overlooks the river, and he thinks I have gone away to make arrangements with a man I know for a boat. I don't think he has any arms, but he'll be nasty if he has. Perhaps you'd better let the officer go first, gentlemen."

The officer stood still with the rest to listen, and the light of a lamp fell full upon his face. Mr. Bethesda read there no sign of an enthusiastic creption of his plan.

"What's the job, gentlemen?" inquired the officer dubiously.

"Come in with me, Baretti," said Tom. "Since the thing has to be done let us do it."

"Very well," returned Baretti. One hand toyed with the revolver in his pocket, and he passed the other through Tom's arm. Bethesda led the way once more, and they followed, stepping boldly, though Bethesda began to go on tip-toe.

"In there," whispered the informer, "the room before you."

The two friends walked through an open doorway into an unevenly paved passage. There Baretti took the lead, and after a step or two in the darkness, struck against the door and threw it open. The room thus revealed to sight contained but one occupant, and he was recognisable at a glance, though he had assumed a rough great-coat of pilot cloth and a huge comforter encircled his throat. Two candles burned upon a foul deal table, and Mark Carroll's face glared pale between them as he half rose and faced his visitors. He had the look of a man who had been dozing, and for a second he was uncertain of their identity. But he had no sooner made them out than he cast both arms abroad and sent the two rushlights flying. Next he seized the slight table, and lifting it over his head, dashed it with all his force in the direction of the doorway, and followed it with a rush. Luckily for Baretti and Tom the clumsy missile, hurled at haphazard in the dark, caught the edge of the door, whence it fell minus a leg. It was no time for Mark to elaborate means of escape, and he had no time to think that his own weapon would prove a barrier against him. As he ran forward the table took him at the knees, and he plunged head foremost at the pit of Tom's

stomach. It is one thing to have benevolent scruples about prosecuting a criminal who is a relative and was a friend, and it is another to find yourself with your nerves suddenly alert, and your blood suddenly afire at actual grips with that same enemy, as he tries to bolt before you have had a chance of letting him off. Tom, though Mark's velocity and weight doubled him up for a moment, pinned the fugitive before he could regain his feet, and held on like iron. Mark lay quiet and sullen, seeing the other figures at the outer doorway, and recognising the hopelessness of the struggle.

Baretti struck a light and found the candles. They were broken, but he relit them and stuck them against the wall by their own grease. Then he dragged the table out of the doorway, and Mark came in submissively with Tom, who kicked the door close, and released his prisoner. Mark's unconscious hand arranged the great red comforter round his neck and smoothed his disordered hair. Then, for a second or two, he stood panting and glaring, with his fingers entwined in the comforter, looking like a man with a halter round his throat. Tom looked back at him steadily, but with a sort of wonder.

"Damn you!" said Mark, breathing the words slowly and softly through clenched teeth.

"I never did you an ill turn in my life, Mark," said Tom. "I befriended you; I gave you money. I never spared myself in your services. What made you hate me so?"

"Hate you?" said Mark. "I never hated you, you buttery nincompoop."

"You waste words with him," Barette broke in, contemptuously. "You might as well talk to a wild beast. He has neither heart nor conscience."

"Your friend's star is in the ascendant, Mr. Barette," said Mark. "He has a rare taste in sycophants. Stick to him, and you will prosper."

"Mr. Mark Carroll," said the painter, "when your rattlesnake is killed, and you hold his teeth and his poison-bags in your hand, you may regard the venomous apparatus with interest, but it cannot wound you any longer."

"You were discerning enough, Mr. Barette," said Mark, "to observe just now that words are wasted on me. You have got me. What are you going to do with me? I am tired. I am not altogether recovered from a recent illness. I am down upon my luck, at odds with fortune, and likely to be poor company for a pair of triumphant young fellows like you. I can't dismiss you, more's the pity. It would be useless to ask you to call to-morrow, I suppose."

Tom tasted to the heart the bitterness of this bravado.

"Barette," he said, turning to the painter, "leave us for a moment."

"This is my affair, Carroll," said Barette. "I will leave him to you, but I will be played off with no remorseful cheat."

"Go," said Tom beseechingly, "leave us for a moment." Barette left the room and closed the door behind him. They heard his feet stumble on the ill-lighted passage, and Tom waited for a little while before he addressed his cousin. "Mark," he

said then, "we have been disgraced enough already, and I want to spare my father what I can. I paid off all old scores with you at Overhill. You have made new ones since, but they have been paid off too. I don't profess to have one scrap of friendship or regard left for you. I don't profess to have much pity."

"Curse your pity," said Mark. "Get it over."

"I have not moved in this matter willingly," Tom went on, "but Baretti has offered a reward of two hundred pounds for your apprehension, and he is bent upon surrendering you to justice. I think Baretti values me enough to give up that pleasure for my sake. But you have some of my father's property in your possession and you must surrender it."

Mark fell upon his knees and dragged a portmanteau from a shadowy corner. This he opened, and from it he extracted a bundle, which he handed to his cousin. Tom turned over its contents by the light of the two guttering candles, each of which had by this time a spire of soot above it on the dirty whitewash of the wall.

"The bank-notes are not here, I think," he said quietly. Mark produced his pocket-book and, without a word, took out the notes and placed them in his cousin's outstretched hand. Tom set them with the rest, and put them in his pocket. "I shall pay the reward from this," he said, tapping his breast to indicate the notes, "and I think my father will hold that excusable. Baretti will let you go at my request, and I shall hope to escape the disgrace of your trial and conviction. It

may not be too late, even yet, Mark, to try straight courses."

"My dear Tom," said Mark. "You overestimate yourself if you think that your powers of oratory are stronger or more persuasive than the circumstances I stand in. You win. I lose. Let that be enough for you."

"Don't you think—apart from your loss in the game you played—that you might have acted better by an old friend?"

"You are letting me go, Tom, and you have a right to air your goodness. I always told you that our philosophies were wide apart. You side with the ruck who pretend, and I side with the few who make no pretences."

"You!" cried Tom. "You make no pretences? You, the perjured liar, hiding and skulking here from justice! You the candid man? If you saw yourself as I see you, you would die for shame."

"The dying gladiator had a right to cover up his face so that no man should see his pains," said Mark. "Let me wear my mask of cynical villainy to the end, Tom, since I have worn it so long. You shall be as justly indignant and as gloriously magnanimous as you wish, without complaint from me. I am used to my part; you are used to yours. We could scarcely play in any other character just yet. And, for God's sake, Tom, get it over and let me go. I am deadly tired, and I am ill, and I am just as willing to go into a police-cell as to be set at liberty to starve."

Tom looked at him for a moment, and then,

with a nod or two which bespoke his surrender of the puzzle Mark presented to him, he turned to the door and called Baretti. The painter entered and looked from one to the other. Mark dragged the broken table to the wall, and propping it there sat down upon it, and with great diligence pared and cleaned his nails.

"Baretti," said Tom, "I have promised Mark that he shall go."

"I have promised myself that he shall not go," said Baretti. "You shall do no such monstrous injustice as to throw a villain like this loose upon the world. Justice and common sense cry out against it."

"Have I no right to save myself a little pain and shame?" Tom asked. "Have I not suffered almost enough at this man's hands already? Has not my father suffered almost enough already? As for revenge—look at the man and think of the sense of defeat and shame that gnaws that hard heart of his. Do you fancy I want more than that, or could have more if I tried for it?"

Mark looked up and tried to smile. "Well hit, Tom!" he said. "Tom is quite right, Signor Baretti. I am an object for commiseration."

The painter looked at him with passionate disdain.

"Go!" he cried, falling back upon his own language in his wrath. "Live chained to yourself, you dog, and eat your own heart till it poisons you!" Tom, not understanding the words, and misinterpreting the fiery gestures which accompanied them, put himself between Mark and

Baretti. "Let him go, Carroll, if you will," said the painter with sudden quiet. "You are right, perhaps. Let him go."

"I can appreciate the delicacy of your motives, Tom," said Mark. "But you appear to forget that my escape does not depend upon you alone. I must say, as Shylock said, that you take my life when you do take the means whereby I live. You have stripped me. I have no means of getting away. You will have me caught, and I shall besmear that delicate family honour of yours, unless you supply me with the wherewithal for travel."

Without a word Tom took the bundle of notes from his pocket, and having counted out fifty pounds by the dim light of the two flaring candles, now very near their end, he handed that sum to Mark—who counted it over again, and disposed it in his pocket-book, also without a word.

"You may go," said Tom, after a moment's pause. Mark peered about him on the floor, and having found a cap there, put it on and walked from the room. The others followed and saw him meet Bethesda in the outer street.

"I am not valiant, neither," said Mark, with a bitter laugh, "but every puny whipster gets my sword. Even this poor devil can despise me. Well, Bethesda, have you made your two hundred?"

Bethesda stood silent and amazed for a while, but finding voice at last, he turned upon Tom, and almost gasped at him—

"You have let him go, sir?"

"I have let him go," said Tom.

"Then," cried Bethesda desperately, "my life isn't worth a minute's purchase."

"My dear Bethesda," said Mark, "I am reformed. My cousin's nobility has melted me, and I am a disciple of the creed of Namby Pamby. To you as the chief instrument in my conversion—inasmuch as you brought the converter and myself together—I owe the most heartfelt thanks. I may be able to repay you some day, Bethesda. I should like to heap coals of fire upon you, Bethesda. I should also like to heap you upon coals of fire. Good-night, Tom. Good-night, Signor Baretti. Good-night, Bethesda. Good-night to you, sir," to the officer. "One of these days we may be better acquainted. You, I believe," he continued, turning to the long-shore man, "will answer to the name of Joe."

"I've got a right to answer to it," said the long-shore man, "seein' as it's the name as I was crissened under."

"Do you know what name I answer to?" asked Mark.

"No, I don't; and what's more, I don't want to," said the man.

"Curiosity is sometimes a vice, and its opposite a virtue," said Mark quietly. "Are you willing to earn a sovereign easily?"

"I'm allays that," returned the man, "provided it's to be done honest, mind you."

"A tribute to *your* presence, officer," Mark observed, turning courteously to the policeman. "There is a portmanteau of mine indoors, Joe."

Find that, if you please, and then oblige me by finding a boat. I want to drop down river this morning."

The long-shore man went into the house for the portmanteau and brought it back with him. Mark lit a cigar in the interim and smoked with a pretence of tranquillity. When the man emerged from the doorway he motioned to him to lead, and followed him toward the river. Tom and Baretti watched him till he turned from sight, and each drew a breath of relief when he was gone.

"You don't want me, gentlemen?" said the policeman. "I'm on my beat, that's certain, but I haven't touched my mates at either end of it, and they'll think there's something up."

Baretti slipped four or five shillings into the man's hand, and he departed well satisfied.

"Good-night, Bethesda," said Tom, moving away. "Your money shall be paid you, provided that you have kept your trust."

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said Bethesda, "but did you tell Mr. Mark Carroll—did you give him any idea as to where I meant to go, Sir?"

"None," said Tom.

"I am not safe from him anywhere," said Bethesda wretchedly. "He's a perfect fiend. There's no bottom to his cunning, and he doesn't know what pity means."

"You should have thought of these things before you earned your money," said Baretti, as he turned to go. Bethesda seemed to cling to them.

"I made arrangements, gentlemen," said he,

"to drop down river this morning; but he has gone before me, and I dare not do it. He's got pluck enough besides that, gentlemen, to walk into the first police-station and give information against me."

"You have done your work and earned your money at your own risk, Bethesda," said Baretti.

"But we never bargained that he was to be let off, gentlemen," cried Bethesda. "He's at large, and I have made an enemy for life."

"Naturally," said Baretti. "Good-night." He drew Tom away, and the miserable Bethesda stood for a while looking after them. In two or three minutes he recovered something of his self-possession and began to make his way through the silent streets towards his own residence. He had a walk of some two miles before him, and he was nervous about all the corners and all the shadowy places. His home reached at last, he admitted himself by a latchkey, and, moving like a ghost, took up a portmanteau and a bottle from the room in which he had conversed with Mark a few hours earlier. Bearing these with him, he stole out at the back door and crept along a weedy garden to the riverside. There lay a boat with a heap of tarpaulin at the bottom of it. As Bethesda made his cautious way down the steps the tarpaulin moved, and a man appeared from beneath it.

"That you, master? You're precious late. It's cold waitin', I can tell you."

"Take a little comfort, George," said Bethesda, proffering the man the bottle. The fellow took it and drank greedily.

"That's the right sort," he said, as he restored the cork. "That warms a man."

"Quietly down stream, George," said Bethesda, bestowing the portmanteau at the stern. He took the tiller-ropes, the man cast loose the painter and took the sculls. The boat glided into the centre of the river, and Bethesda shook his hand lightly towards the house from which he was retreating. "The bill of sale," said Bethesda inwardly, "will take effect to-morrow. The two hundred is providential, but——"

His thoughts were comfortless, and he kept a keen look-out ahead. All the shadowy places were dangerous to him in his fancy, and he steered from side to side of the stream, and took fright a thousand times. He reflected that he was doing the safest thing after all. The Thames is a big-gish river, and it is possible for two people to be on it at the same time without each being aware of the other. His enemy had started an hour ago, had begun two miles lower down, and had not the remotest reason to believe that he would follow. He was convinced that he was safe enough, and in spite of his conviction he was very much afraid.

"She's lying off Greenwich, isn't she, George?" he asked after a time.

"What, the 'Goshawk'?" said the man. "Oh! she's there right enough."

"She isn't doing anything——" Mr. Bethesda paused with a lingering accent of inquiry.

"Fishy?" said the man with a laugh. "She's done with that sort of game, I should fancy. The blue un's is too fly, sir."

Mr. Bethesda sighed an assent to this poetic statement of a grief.

"Yes," he said, "the Customs officers are exceedingly alert, exceedingly alert."

"Alert! cuss 'em," said the man with the sculls, and finding himself unequal to the expression of his feelings he spat vehemently.

The moon had fallen, and except for the twinkling lights that shone here and there the eye found nothing to rest upon outside the sweep of the sculls. Bethesda peered eagerly forward and saw a million things which had no reality. Hulk-ing ships moved up to override the boat and melted when they touched her, and shadowy craft of smaller size with a shadow's silence crossed her course, Bethesda holding his breath until the expected collision came, and his own boat floated through the phantom. But in a while the black air began to take a tone of grey, and a real hulk came out coldly here and there. Then the mantle of the night was lifted by another fold, and he could see the shore on either side the stream.

"It's a longish pull to Greenwich, governor," said the oarsman.

"You don't earn thirty shillings every day," returned Bethesda, drily.

"I ain't a-grumblin'," the man answered. "You allays paid a fairish price, governor. It ain't that. The walls of my stomach is regular falling in, I do assure you. There's a public-house a half-mile down as'll be open by the time we get to it. A bit o' cold meat'd be the making of me. There's no hurry for the 'Goshawk', governor."

"Very well," said Bethesda, though he dreaded the land. It was absurd, of course, to fancy that Mark Carroll would be so great a fool as to walk into danger, as he would have to do if he betrayed his betrayer now. But to the criminal mind, when it is constituted on the pattern of Mr. Bethesda's, it does not greatly matter that any dread may be ridiculously unfounded. It sees its ghosts and knows that they are ghosts and nothing more, but it expects a solid hand to stretch out from each of them, and mental certainty and nervous fear are constantly at war. Bethesda grew more and more nervous as time went on, and in the gathering light he watched the shore and the river with increased misgiving. In the course of some three-quarters of an hour, for the tide was running strongly up stream and their progress was slow, they came to the house of which the man had spoken, and he, pulling inshore, made fast the boat at the bottom of a set of slimy steps, and landed. Bethesda, with a big cloak pulled high about his neck, followed up the slimy steps and into a littered yard. A sensation he had never in his waking hours experienced before was upon him, and he seemed surrounded by some such nameless und unformed terror as that which attacks men in nightmare. It was raining, the morning wind was keen, and he pulled the cloak higher about his face, as with bent head he crossed the yard towards the open door. The man pushed in before him past a lounging figure there, and Bethesda essayed to follow, but the figure planting itself

straight across the doorway, he looked up with a start and saw Mark Carroll. He recoiled in dismay, and Mark followed with one forward step.

"Well, Bethesda?" said Mark coolly. "We seem fated to encounter each other."

Bethesda with a white face looked at him for a second or two, and then glanced right and left, as if looking for a chance to run away.

"We can be dangerous to each other, Mr. Warner," he said, when he had a little recovered himself, "but is it worth our while, sir? Don't you think we had better avoid each other, sir?"

"Don't you think," asked Mark, in answer, "that you had better have put that question to yourself last night?"

"I foresaw what would happen, sir," returned Bethesda. "I knew your cousin was not the man to proceed to extremities."

"Bethesda," said Mark, "this is not the time or the place for payment, but I have a score against you, and I shall pay it. Trust me."

"I beg your pardon, sir," cried Bethesda, with a ghost of his habitual smile, "but don't you think that just at present it might be worth your while to overlook last night, sir. It may be in my power to serve you now, Mr. Warner. It can't be comfortable for you to be in England, and the regular channels are pretty closely watched, sir, I suppose."

"You ask me to trust you again," said Mark, "to be betrayed again?"

They had walked away from the house door by a mutual instinct of fear, lest they should be

overheard, and now they were near the edge of the quay.

"Betrayed, sir," said Bethesda. "What for? What could I get by betraying you? I should only get myself into danger."

There was something in it, Mark thought. Bethesda had run his risk once for the sake of pay. He was not likely to run it again for nothing.

"I am leaving the country myself, Mr. Warner," Bethesda continued in a whisper, and with quick fearful glances right and left. "I can find you a safe passage over to Boulogne, and there you have the world before you. What's the use of our trying to do each other harm, sir, when if you strike a blow at me it must be fatal to yourself, and if I strike a blow at you I run my own neck into a noose for nothing?"

Mark laid both hands on the cloak Bethesda wore and held him firmly. It was the gesture he had used with his cousin Tom at the beginning of their quarrel at Overhill, and it was a thing that came natural to him and was significant of character.

"What are you going to do?" cried Bethesda, with a terror-stricken face. They were standing within a yard of the edge of the quay, and there was a look in Mark's eyes which filled him with fear and loosened his knees beneath him. Mark saw his dread and smiled grimly.

"You poor coward," he said. "Listen to me."

"Yes, sir," said Bethesda. Mark could feel him trembling.

"Do you think," he asked, "that it is worth my while to throw you over there? Can't you swim, you quaking coward?"

"No," said Bethesda; "not a stroke."

For the first and last time in his life a real rage unleashed itself in Mark Carroll's heart, and for the first and last time he acted on an impulse. There had not been a thought of murder in his mind. He was one of the unlikeliest men in the world to think of it as a practicable method of revenge. But Bethesda's cowardice put it there; the opportunity was there—a sudden swirl and rush of hate and rage filled every cranny of his mind.

"Not a stroke," said Bethesda.

"Then damn you—drown!" Mark hissed between his teeth, and shot Bethesda backward into the stream. But the heavier man clutched at him like lightning, and they fell together, Bethesda underneath. The water at the quayside was deep, but they went down until they touched the bottom, and Bethesda held on madly. Mark set his knees against the other's breast and tore himself away, but almost before he reached the surface he felt a pair of arms closing round his neck. He turned to free himself, and in the same instant struck out strongly with both feet, so that the rose high in the water, and the groping hands missed his neck, but clutched his left arm, and there was Bethesda's face below him at the surface gasping and glaring. Mark struck it again and again, and Bethesda let out a series of gurgling yells and went down once more, dragging his enemy with him. This time

Mark got his feet against Bethesda's body, and struck out with all his might, but the drowning wretch held on. They came up a second time, and Mark could see the slow light heave at him as he struggled to the surface. When he reached it, a hand clutched his hair and held on tightly. Another hand clutched Bethesda, and the two were hauled into a boat. Mark looked round, and saw that the pier from which he and Bethesda had fallen was by this time forty yards away. Bethesda was still holding to his sleeve, and was howling and spluttering still.

"He tried to drown me. There's a warrant out against him for perjury."

Mark raised his hand and struck Bethesda in the face.

"Hillo! Stop that!" cried an authoritative voice. Mark looked round upon the man who seized him, and then upon the boat's crew and the boat.

"A detachment of the Thames police, I believe," he said quietly. "Very well. This gentleman is the largest smuggler in London—Mr. Bethesda. You can take care of both of us."

CHAPTER XV.

"No news from the governor, Baretti?" said Tom, on a day three months later. He was dressed for a journey, and his room was in such disorder as with some men results from the hasty packing of a portmanteau.

"No news," returned Baretti. "I had hoped for an answer which would have made this unnecessary, or, indeed, impossible."

"Why?" said Tom. "I give you my word, Baretti, that if it had not been for the things my father has had to suffer I should have been glad to see affairs turn out so. Here's an honourable living in my fingers, and a chance to see a little bit of the world in various aspects. You don't appreciate the importance of the position, Baretti. I am the great Hoffmann's solo violinist, and the second captain of his host. He will play in the course of the tour a dozen compositions of mine, and my fame will be carried into the corners of the earth. But my cab is at the door and the train awaiteth me. Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you."

"Write often," said Baretti. "Good-bye."

Tom took up his violin case from the table and ran downstairs. Baretti waved him an adieu from the open window as he came upon the street, and Tom entering his cab was driven away. Borne to the railway station, he took a third-class ticket—resolute to begin his new career economically—and in due time was landed at Birmingham, where he drove to an hotel, dined, and dressed in time for the first concert of the great Herr Hoffmann's provincial tour. He walked to the Town Hall and found his own name blazoned on the placards outside in red letters almost as big as Hoffmann's own. There was a great crowd outside the building, and cabs and carriages were rolling up at a great pace. He never thought for a moment that Hoff-

mann had engaged him for any other reason than a warm approval of his musical powers might furnish. But the great Herr, though a severe musician, was a keen man of business into the bargain, and a born showman. He knew, if Tom did not, the value of a man whose name for the past three or four months had been in everybody's mouth as the hero of one of the most exciting real-life dramas the public could remember.

Tom made his way to the side door to which he had been directed by his chief's last letter, and, being admitted, found himself in the midst of a little crowd of his fellow-artists. He had rehearsed with them in London, and knew most of them by sight, but he had as yet not even a casual acquaintance with any of his confrères. So with a nod here and there in answer to the recognising salutes of one or two of them, he walked to one end of the room and read absently the big poster announcing the concert. "Soprani: Madame Fiorituri and Miss Moore." Who was Miss Moore? Could it be possible that his old playfellow and protégée had already advanced far enough to be engaged by Hoffmann?

He was hoping it might prove so, for her sake, when the chief's voice aroused him, and the instrumentalists began to move towards the orchestra. Hoffmann, beholding him, shook hands in a very friendly fashion, and was evidently disposed to make much of him. In a little while the business of the night began, and Tom was too much absorbed in his work to think more of the name he had seen upon the placard until the owner of it

appeared before him on the platform. Azubah was prepared for this meeting, and saluted him gravely. The song she sang had an orchestral accompaniment, and that fact kept Tom in his place, otherwise he might have met her below, and have spoken to her. When she sang she surprised and pleased him, and he was delighted that the audience recalled her. He had no more to do until the second part of the concert; and on her disappearance from the platform, he followed.

"I wondered if it would turn out to be you whose name I saw advertised for the concert," he said, when he had overtaken her. "You have improved immensely. You will make a name, Miss Moore, and nobody will be better pleased than I shall."

He thought as he looked at her that she had improved in more respects than one. To talk of beauty unadorned is all very well in its way, no doubt, but there are some people who pay for dressing. Tom had never seen the girl in anything but the simplest costume until now, and she showed to surprising advantage. She had made her dress with her own hands, but she had caught the best points of the prevailing style, and the mode and material alike suited her. Whilst Tom spoke to her she drew an opera cloak over her white shoulders, and pulled the hood, which was lined with snow-white down, over her head.

"Do you really think my singing improved, Mr. Carroll?" she asked.

"Wonderfully," said Tom, "wonderfully." She blushed with pleasure.

"You gave me an admirable master," she said, shyly. "He made me work very hard, but I did not like him any the less for that."

"Nobody can make anything of art," said Tom, "who is afraid of work." He was looking at her with a new interest all the time. She was not what he would have called a lady. His father's manner of separating ranks had naturally descended to him. But he admitted that she made so excellent an imitation that nobody could have told the difference. Her father was a half-bankrupt farmer, and her mother kept a dairy in South London, but, so far as sight or hearing went, just now, she might have been born in a mansion, and bred all her days in the best society. "How did you come to meet Hoffman?" he asked. "Are you with us for the whole of the English tour?"

"Yes," she said, answering the last question first. "I went to Mr. Hoffmann and asked him to hear me sing."

"That was courageous," said Tom, with a laugh.

"Was it?" she asked simply. "I wanted to do something for father."

"What did Hoffmann say?" asked Tom, "at first? I can tell what he said at last."

"I told him why I had called, and he threw the piano open, and made a motion with his hand. I sat down at once and sang. When I had done he said 'Something else.' I sang something else, and then he said 'Leave your address. Good morning.' He wrote two days later offering me an engagement."

"Weren't you afraid of him?" asked Tom.

"Oh," she answered, "not at all. I had heard that he was odd and eccentric before I called, and I knew partly what to expect. I should have liked it better if he had given me a little time to prepare myself, but I am not very nervous about singing now."

Now Tom had nothing very special to say to Miss Moore so far as he remembered just then, but she had one or two things which she wanted very especially to say to him, and as yet could not. She had no right to speak to him of his private news, and yet it seemed so cold and thankless a thing (after all she owed him and all he had done for her) to meet him here in his fallen fortunes and show him no sympathy.

"I suppose not," Tom said, absently, to her last statement. He had only half heard it, and was not paying any great attention to her speech, and now he took to trifling with his watch-chain and looked straight over her head meantime, as if he saw something sorrowful at a great distance. She noted this keenly, and her heart stirred with pity over him. Something that was not pity moved within her also, but she had neither the desire nor the power to define that tender emotion. Girls of twenty or thereabouts are not greatly given to self-analysis by nature. It is likely enough that Tom's troubles had given a tone of sorrowfulness to his expression of face when he had nothing to animate him and was silent. She was thinking of his altered fortunes, and it seemed

natural to fancy or to feel that he was thinking of them also.

"I am sorry to see you here, Mr. Carroll."

Her voice sounded still in her own ears, and he looked at her with an almost startled air, or she might have doubted that she had spoken, the words had at last so unconsciously framed themselves. He looked at her and read her meaning at once.

"Thank you," he said, answering her meaning and not her words. "I shall like the life very much, I have no doubt. My father is very unhappy, and I am sorry about that. There is nothing else to grieve me greatly."

It struck him directly he had spoken that this was an odd thing to say, and a second or two later it came into his mind that it was much more singular to have meant it. How little he thought about Mary now! She had used to be constantly in his thoughts, and now he felt with a self-accusation of disloyalty that her image had been banished from his mind. Azubah was hailed a moment later by that same country-looking woman in whose care Tom had last seen her. The old lady bobbed at Tom when she recognised him, and was plainly embarrassed. He nodded back at her with a cordial recognition.

"I shall see you again, Mr. Carroll," said Azubah, timidly.

"Yes," he said, somewhat more gravely than he intended, "we shall meet often."

She went away half ready to cry, thinking that she had exceeded her right and had offended

him. He sat down in a corner of the room and tried, by thinking, to recall that lost image of whose existence he had just been reminded—the image he had sworn a thousand times never to forget. It had, of course, seemed impossible to forget her. It was now just as impossible to recall her, or to bring back the old warmth and tenderness of heart. He wondered if she had ceased to think of him in the course of these eventful months. He knew that she must have heard of him often enough, and he was ready to writhe with shame at the memory of his own publicity. How had she thought of him? Had she believed in him all through, or had she waited for the proof of his innocence to appear? In either case he was soiled enough to be distasteful to himself. He aggravated himself with questions, and aggravated himself the more, because at heart he had ceased greatly to care what the answers might be. But now he came to think about it, it was so much of a surprise to find he had ever ceased to think about it that it was not easy to leave the theme. By and by, finding himself alone, he began to pace to and fro thinking. Azubah caught sight of him once or twice as he passed the half open doorway of the room in which she sat, and to her mind it was as clear as day that her ill-advised speech had set him thinking of the advantages which had fallen away from him, and the undeserved shames which had gathered round him in their place. The kindest and the best of men, so regal in his generosity, so unselfish, and to have suffered such indignities! So handsome

—that went for something, though she never thought so—so young, so gifted, so unfortunate. It felt like heartbreak to think of these things.

If she could have read Tom's thoughts, she might have sympathised less keenly with him, but then that is often so. To know that he was trying to flog a dead love for another woman into life again would scarcely have pleased her.

At the interval the members of the orchestra came swarming downstairs, and for a few minutes the room was extremely noisy. The thread of Tom's thought was broken, and he forgot to piece it for the time being, and the great Hoffmann, being in a good humour with success, clapped him on the shoulder and cracked a joke, at which he laughed readily enough. Azubah saw this also, but nothing Tom did could fail to win her admiration. How brave it was of him to throw off his troubles so, and laugh them in the face. The poor girl had been too busy all her life to read romances, or she might have found out before this time what was the matter with herself. Nowadays no virgin need be ignorant of the meaning of the first movements of the virgin heart. Novelists and novelettists, poets and poetasters, are thick about her, and are ready to teach her all she should know and something that she should not. But Azubah lived outside their influence, and so she fell in love in Nature's own fashion, which is perhaps the best, and had no self-conscious flutters and promptings, nor any bookish pruderies. She fell in love, or glided into love, as a good girl ought to do, unwittingly and

unthinkingly. There is always a delicacy—or there should always be a delicacy—in a man's mind about invading the privacy of maiden thought and feeling. The hands that draw apart the curtain are profane.

When Azubah had sung her last song and was prepared to leave the hall, she and Tom encountered once more, and said good-night.

"By-the-by," said he, "we are due at Manchester to-morrow. By what train do you travel? We might go on together. There are a hundred things I want to speak about."

She was the little farm girl still and he still the lordly Seigneur.

She told him what he wished to know, and he arranged to meet her at the railway station. They travelled together and talked of old times and old people and of the prospect of the dairy and her father's health. The old woman who played the part of Azubah's chaperon was not accustomed to travel, and could not sleep in strange beds. Her night having been broken, she fell fast asleep now and left them to themselves, but there was nothing in their speech to which the world might not have listened. There was nothing in Tom Carroll's thoughts that the whole world might not have known. The girl was certainly wonderfully improved, and he acknowledged with some surprise that she might have taken her place in any society and have drawn forth none but approving comments.

One thing which would have come sooner but that his life had been lived in such a whirl

for the past three months began to impress itself upon his mind, and this was the occasion on which he had seen Azubah in the prison court-yard at Worcester. It pained him to think that curiosity had taken her to the Assize Court to witness the trial, and since he was not the sort of young man who fancies every second girl in love with him, no notion of a tender interest on her part entered his head. He could not question her about it, but he found her travelling companion alone that evening and spoke to her, and the old woman with no prompting led up to the theme herself. She was what is called in the country a notable woman, and she spoke her own mind to everybody, gentle and simple, with amazing freedom.

"It was the talk of the country, Mr. Thomas," she said, "as you and your poor dear father 'ud be amakin' things up, and I'm sorry to see as it isn't so. I look on it as a bit of come down for Moore's daughter to be play-actin' about the country i' this wise, and for gentlefolks born and bred it do not look proper, that I *am* sure."

"Well, you know, Mrs. Askin," said Tom, good-humouredly, "it's a very agreeable method of earning a living."

"You hadn't ought to earn a livin', sir," said the elderly dame, with warmth. "Now that cousin of yours is found out, sir, as did you all that mischief, you ought to be at home again enjoying of your own. Excuse me makin' so bold, sir, but why don't you go home and speak to the old Squire?"

A dignified man might have resented this

inquiry, but Tom had never set up to be dignified, and he answered simply that he had rather not talk of that matter just then. The notable woman's tongue once being loosened, away she went.

"Oh, sir," said she, "it's well beknown—beggin' your pardon for saying of it—as you and your father's a pair, and pride's in the family. Not as ever you was proud to folks like We, for many a time me and Askin said to one another as there was nobody haffabler than Mister Thomas in our part of the country. But you gentlefolks is sort of hard and stand-off one with another, sir, and if a old woman might speak her mind as was a tenant of your father's for thirty 'ear, it's your fault, sir, as much as hisn. There's me and our Zubah's talked it over pretty often, and we're o' one mind about that, though it ain't often as we are."

"You have your little disagreements then?" said Tom, laughing, though a little constrainedly.

"We're like other folks," said the old lady, "and she's headstrong like most young things. Self-will ain't the word for her. When her was astaying down with me three months ago, afore I ever thought of coming down to this and goin' round the country with a lot of foreigners and fiddlecrapers—begging *your* pardon, sir—the way she would go into Worcester for to hear you tried was a'most past bearin' with. And she was that ill afore she started. I says to her, I says, 'Zubah, you ain't fit to stir out of the house,' I says; and says she, 'Aunt, I shall go, and it's no use of your talkin'.' 'Very well,' I says, 'lookin' as you look now,' I says, 'I shouldn't

be surprised if you was to ketch your death.' She was that ill she could hardly walk, and a tremblin' and faintin' like, a'most all the way to the railway station, and the same all the way to the court. And she no sooner gets to the inside of the buildin', after as bad a crush as ever I see in my life, than she faints stone dead away."

"It was unadvised," said Tom, to whom all this was painful. "Excuse me, Mrs. Askin, I must see to business."

He had nothing to do, but he wanted to escape from her, so he bustled about and began to overturn a great pile of music, and to make notes which meant nothing. The old woman left him to his own thoughts. They were a little complex, but they all drifted about Azubah. There was every reason why the girl should take a friendly interest in his fate. She had known him all her life, and he had been of use to her, and she, no doubt, had been grateful to him. When a young man begins to think much about a young woman, you need scarcely look for any logical sequence in his thoughts. How very much improved she was. How very pretty she had grown. There was something in her way of looking at one. Curious that he should think about her so much. The artistic nature, and the girl had an artistic nature, is always sensitive. Swooned on entering the court, did she, poor thing? Why, the trial lasted three hours, and he had found her still insensible when he left the dock on his acquittal. Then he remembered how she looked at him when she recovered.

Somehow the old woman's talk did not seem likely to be so painful to him as it had been awhile ago. By this time Azubah was talking to Madame Fiorituri, for she had, in one way or another, picked up Italian enough to hold a conversation, and Mrs. Askin was sitting at some distance from her. Tom sauntered towards the old lady with a sheet of music in his hand.

"I have found what I was looking for," he said. The most honest of men cannot always be expected to speak literal truths. "I am sorry to have interrupted you, Mrs. Askin. You were just telling me that Miss Moore fainted. You could not have got into court at the beginning of the trial."

"Lord bless you, no, sir," said the notable woman. "We might have stuck in the crowd till now if Askin's nephew, which is a Superintendent in the force, hadn't come up to clear the folks away. He sees me of a sudden, when we'd been awaiting there two hours at least, regular blocked up and not able to move one way or another all the time, and that hot it felt like a oven, and 'For the Lord's sake, Joseph,' I says, 'get us out of this.' 'No,' says she, 'let us get inside. I must get inside,' she says. So says he, 'This way,' and he takes us by a byway, and just as we gets into the court we saw you, sir, and the juryman says 'Not guilty,' and the crowd begins to cheer. There was a gentleman there, sir, which perhaps you may remember. His name was Chandler, and he kep' a shop in the town in the linendrapery line, and I asked him, 'Who's not

guilty for the Lord's sake?' I says, 'Is it Mr. Thomas?' 'It is,' he says, and 'look at your niece.' And there was Azubah swooned dead away."

"Mr. Carroll," said a voice from the foot of the orchestra stairs. Tom turned. "Waiting for you, sir."

Tom caught up his violin and made for the orchestra. The noise of applause went through him like an inspiring wind as he stepped upon the platform, and left him no thought but that of his art and the business of the moment. Hoffmann waved his hand, his bow gripped the strings, and he forgot everything but music.

An hour later he was in his own room at his hotel, smoking a last pipe before turning into bed. What a tender-hearted, sensitive little thing she was, he thought. How lady-like and lovely she had grown. Altogether, how she had improved.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE is a sort of self-conscious young man who in these circumstances would have been able to guess the truth. Perhaps the self-conscious young man is far (in the long run) from having an advantage over the young man who is not self-conscious. He can read unmistakable signs rightly, but he can also read mistakable signs wrongly, and that is sometimes uncomfortable for him. Tom read nothing.

The great Hoffmann's company travelled through the great provincial cities, and won golden opinions from all sorts of people. Monsieur Strapinsky played Tom's sonata for the pianoforte, "the carefully-selected and magnificently-trained orchestra" performed his symphony, Madame Fiorituri sang his aria, and Miss Moore his last ballad, and he himself played his last nocturne. Altogether there was a good deal of Tom Carroll in the great Hoffmann's programme, and the public applauded him. The critics called him "this genuinely English musician;" the publishers began to find his music in demand, and there was a talk about reviving "Godiva" at one of the London theatres. He bore success modestly, made an income more than equal to his wants, and was fairly happy. People received him (when he had leisure to be received at all) with the consideration due to a member of a good old county family, and he was allowed to feel that he was any man's equal still.

The enterprising Hoffmann was not only a musician with a name to conjure money from the public pocket, but an admirable man of business and first-rate showman. He made arrangements, therefore—knowing when generosity paid him—to give his troupe a holiday here and there, and he even took the trouble before he finally fixed his engagements to consult his soloists and the members of his orchestra as to the places and times at which they would like the breaks in the week's work to come in. Most of them did not care at all, and when any man did care his voice for the most part settled the matter. Apart from these

holidays Hoffmann worked his army fiercely, and himself worked hardest of all.

The spare days had promised to hang somewhat heavily on Tom's hands, but the burden of doing nothing was lightened now that he had a frivolous old woman and a serious young one to share it with him. The elder had a convenient knack of going to sleep in the daytime, a thing she attributed to her sleepless nights, forgetful of the fact that an effect does not create a cause. Tom instructed Azubah in counterpoint whilst the old lady was awake, and when she slept he went on with his lessons. Wonderful how interesting—to an enthusiastic musician—the study of counterpoint may be, when the pupil is a girl whose loveliness is a continual surprise, and whose ways are at once frank and shy. There are as many ways of falling in love as there are men and women in the world. To be always closely associated with a pretty girl who thinks you the handsomest, the wisest, and the best young man in the world, and the most unjustly used, who with perfect delicacy and subtlety lets you understand as much without ever saying a word about it, and obviously does not intend that you should guess her opinions and sentiments—do you think, that in this sort of circumstances you would be pleased with the young woman? If the young woman were really—when you came to look at her—surprisingly pretty, and a little sad for some reason or no reason, and a little in want of help and protection, and sympathy, and society, and

all that—do you think you might begin to feel impelled towards her in an odd sort of way?

The way of a man with a maid.

Tom was perfectly certain that he was bound body and soul to his first and only love, though he was also perfectly certain that he could never go and claim her. These contradictory sentiments could not long exist together, and one had to destroy the other. Conviction's fire and doubt's cold water made a rare steam between them for a while, and then, in due course of time, conviction's fire went out. He had no right to think himself bound to Mary Lording unless she still thought herself bound to him. Since Lording had last called upon him they had held no intercourse, and that was long ago. "I've stuck to you all the time, and I'd stick to you now if you'd let me. But since you won't I'm going. When you come to your senses I shall be glad to hear from you." He remembered Lording's parting words, and he knew that without active cause of quarrel between them they had parted. It had been in Mary's power to write to him and make things smooth again, but she had never done it. He had never blamed her for her silence even when his affection for her was keenest and his heart was sorest, and now, though he did not like to confess it to himself, he was not at all anxious that she should write in the strain he had once longed to hear. He *had* been really, honestly, loyally in love. He himself knew perfectly well that if his love had been crowned by possession he would have gone on loving loyally and tenderly until

death divided him from his wife. But then so many things had come between, and events so moving and absorbing had crowded on one another so swiftly, that she had been pressed from his mind.

If men were ruled by inexorable logic the world would be so altered that nobody now alive would know it. Inconsistency is the most consistent of human characteristics and the most abiding. The heart of man wanders, and even women, who love more personally, can love twice in a lifetime—happily for us and for themselves. A natural-minded young man can find it in his heart to love almost any lovable young woman who happens to be thrown much in his way and to make an appeal to him, unless his heart is filled already. Now, in this case, Azubah came at the most dangerous time, for his heart was just emptied and was feeling empty.

If he had guessed the truth he might have avoided her, for fallen as his fortunes were, he would never of purpose aforethought have deliberately married a milkman's daughter. In all his instincts, hereditary and acquired, he was one of the dominant class, and he was a gentleman to the end of his days, though he were three times a fiddler, and even had he fiddled for his bread in the streets. But he only saw a pair of very beautiful and speaking brown eyes and a gentle, pretty face and a charming soul behind all these outward signs. He knew that the girl was sympathetic, clever and possessed by a passionate love of the art which had for years enthralled himself. He knew that he was absolutely at ease with her,

and if he had asked himself he would have known that nobody thought so well of him as she did. It was delightful to give lessons to so apt and ambitious a pupil, and it was pleasant to stand as well in his own eyes as she somehow made him.

The girl, on her part, began to be wiser than the man. She knew by this time the meaning of her own symptoms, and was brought to confess to herself that she was in love with her old patron and helper. When a girl makes that sort of confession to herself she is as much ashamed, or nearly, as though the whole of her world had found her out in some act of incredible wickedness. She blushed and hid her face in her hands in the solitude of her own chamber when she first thought of it, and many a time afterwards. She would sit and dream with her eyes wide open, and Tom Carroll and she would walk together in vague places until he would bow that magnificent head and turn the light of those wonderful eyes upon her, and his arm would go round her waist and her head fall upon his shoulder, and she would awake in a paroxysm of sweet shame from that entrancing fancy.

They were at Bristol when one of their periodical resting times came about, and a sort of picnic was planned for Ilfracombe. Hoffmann made the affair his own, and ordered a luncheon at the chief hotel. The weather was bright and balmy, and Mrs. Askin went to sleep in the course of the passage across the Channel, though she had made all convenient arrangements for being ill. Tom and Azubah were together during the

brief steamboat journey, and the girl was in a state of fluttering expectancy, as though something strange and unheard-of were certain to happen. They landed, and wandered about the place together as if that were quite natural and in the proper order of things. Other people, who knew more about himself, tacitly agreed to let him alone. The notable woman's free tongue had let everybody know the story as far as she herself knew it, and if anybody had told her, in answer, that the son of her late husband's landlord and the rightful heir to the Trench House estates was falling in love with her niece, she would have laughed. She recognised the distance between them. That Azubah should fall in love with him would have been too absurd to her mind. If you had asked her, plump and plain, whether she thought Tom Carroll or the Prince of Wales the loftier, she would, of course, have pitched upon the Prince, but, unconsciously and habitually, she thought the Carrolls, of Trench House, the greatest people in the world. Azubah had certainly grown wonderfully fine-lady-fied in the last year or two, insomuch that the old woman was a little afraid of her in her inmost heart; but the girl knew her place for all that, and had been bred almost in the shadow of the red-brick mansion at Overhill. In Mrs. Askin's experience love was not the leveller he is in romantic ballads. Gentlefolks married gentlefolks. Bankrupt farmers' daughters might think themselves well off to catch a decent young tradesman. Azubah would probably disgrace herself by an alliance with a fiddler,

but Tom, though he got his living by fiddling, was a sacred amateur in her eyes.

The two young people were together all day, and strolled by the water-side together. It might be interesting to know what they found to talk about? Well, for the greater part of their time they talked about harmony and counterpoint and thorough bass. Tom, once astride his hobby with his feet well in the stirrups was hard to throw, and Azubah was as ready to admire him on hobby-back as she would have been elsewhere. It might have been droll, had there been anyone to listen, to have heard this handsome young man enthusiastically orating to this charming girl about the exquisite employment of the oboe in Strapinski's last sonata or the noble use of the drum in Hoffmann's orchestrated version of somebody else's theme. His face would glow, his eyes would flash, and he would hum little passages with gestures almost as vivid as his friend Baretta's, and improvised "ta ra ra, la ra ra," nodding his head to the tune. To her, it was an almost unmingled happiness to walk and talk with him in this unrestricted freedom, though now and then reason lifted its head and made a protest against the folly of her dreams.

They went strolling along gaily. Tom was well-mounted and his hobby was as steady to ride as ever. There are men who could find other and more appropriate themes than thorough bass with such a face and such a pair of eyes beside them, and in a young man Tom's devotion to music was a little absurd at such an hour. Art is all very

well in its way, but it does not fill the whole of life. Perhaps he began to be aware of that, for he dismounted from his hobby on a sudden and became preternaturally quiet. He walked on by Azubah's side, and neither of them noticed the way very much or thought about the time.

"It's an odd sort of chance," said Tom at last, looking round on his companion, "that throws us together again in this way."

"Yes," she said, "an odd chance."

"I don't know how it is," said Tom, "but I have been thinking a good deal lately of my childhood. We were playmates one day, do you remember?"

"No," she said, with some surprise, "I can't recall it."

He told her drolly of a day on which he had called at the farm and had found her with a small village boy in string harness. For some forgotten reason the steed rebelled against the driver, threw off the harness, and went home in dudgeon. Then the driver had besought or commanded the bystander to be harnessed, and Tom had consented, and had been driven shamefacedly all about the farmhouse and the fold-yard, until, as Fate would have it, Mr. Carroll rode by, and stared with frozen majesty at the spectacle.

"I don't think," said Tom with a laugh, "that he ever quite recovered from it. I was ten years of age at the time, and you, I think, were three. My father saw a fatal want of dignity about me from that hour."

Azubah took this ridiculous infant reminiscence almost seriously, and Tom felt that any little jest that lay in the remembrance had fallen flat.

"It seems only the other day," he began again, after a pause, "that you were a baby. And now you're a public personage with a great reputation."

Somehow that statement seemed to fall flat, also, and her only response was an uncertain little laugh. She had all manner of things to think of. The reminiscence, slight and childish as it was, was a reminder of the distance that had always existed between them. She was thinking, too how long it would have taken her to climb to the place she stood in without his help, and how ill he could afford the help when he gave it. It was impossible to avoid the question whether he had cared for her in more than a common way since he had aided her at such a time. She was yearning over him with all her heart and, as it seemed, with every fibre of her frame, and he knew nothing of it, and would never know.

Tom was quick to discern the change in her manner, but was unable to read it. It chilled him and froze the current of his gay talk. They turned and retraced their steps in silence, and every now and then he stole a look at her. It was not in him by nature to be furtive in any of his ways, but he did not look at her boldly and openly, feeling, as he did, that she was already embarrassed for some reason, and not desiring to embarrass

her more. What had he said that could at all disturb her?

He was tall and broad, and she looked very slight beside him. She knew by some mesmeric influence that he was looking at her, and do what she would she could not keep the blushes from her cheek. Then she blushed for blushing, and when he next stole a look at her, though her eyes were downcast she seemed to know it, and her face was all celestial rosy red. He began to guess, and he began to feel an odd tremor at the heart. Pretty? She was sweetly pretty. How delicately the soft, blushing cheek was rounded. Her ear was like a clear, rosy shell. The fine, long lashes lay upon her cheek with a provoking beauty of their own, and surely she had the prettiest lips and chin in the world.

It is so difficult for words to set forth this kind of thing. He was not taking an inventory of her beauties, but they stole on him one by one with a kind of honeyed surprise, and he thought she cared for him a little more than common. An innocent, loyal, brave, and gentle nature he knew she had. If she loved him? He thrilled and flushed at that with a sudden touch of triumph and delight. If he were only an insolent and self-satisfied ass, and she did nothing of the sort? He grew curiously chilly.

They walked back in unbroken silence, and found that they had been so long away that the boat was ready to start, and everybody else belonging to their party was aboard. The sun was down and the first shade of evening was in

the air. The moon rose, and Azubah, once more under the shelter of her aunt's wing, sat down and leaned her head upon the vessel's rail, and watched the gathering film of light in the skies as the nearer planet grew brighter and the distant stars less bright. She knew without turning her head that Tom Carroll was near at hand engaged in the same sort of exercise. The notable woman employed her own happy faculty and got to sleep, and Tom was somehow beside the girl again.

"A lovely night," said Tom, softly.

"A lovely night," she answered, like a pretty echo.

"Don't you find it a little chilly sitting here?" he asked. "Shall we walk along the deck?"

She arose without speaking, and Tom proffered his arm. She took it, and they walked the deck together. It was ridiculous, but he had nothing to say, and, beat about in his mind as he would, he could find nothing that seemed worth saying. Her hand rested on his arm like a warm snowflake, and passing his right hand across he took hold of it and drew it further. He could feel that it shook a little, and its tremor communicated itself to him. He was making love to the girl he knew, and perhaps he had been doing it longer than he had known. What right had he?

They walked to and fro, and the hand still trembled near his heart. Most of the people were below, and the few on deck were clustered near the wheel watching the great line of moonlight in the water, or chatting gaily in two or three different languages amongst themselves. The bows of

the boat rose high, and when the two walked forward Tom could see that the seat immediately below the top-gallant forecastle was in deep shadow. Anybody sitting there would be invisible from amidships. He turned this fact over in his mind with a curious flutter in his breast, answering all the while to that flutter of the little hand upon his arm. Two or three minutes after he had first made observations of this shadow he paused in it and Azubah paused with him.

"Shall we sit down here?" he asked.

She sat down without verbal answer, removing her hand as she did so, and he sat down beside her. He had nothing to say. There was nothing in his mind worth saying. But in a while his arm was about Azubah's waist, and she was not in the least attempting to repulse him. His arm enfolded her, and her whole figure swayed to his touch, and her head fell upon his shoulder. He took her right hand in his left and he bent down and kissed her. Then he made a discovery, and hailed it quaintly.

"I am in love," he said to himself, "and I never knew what it was like before!"

It is not difficult to fall in love temporarily with a pretty girl when you sit alone with her, shadowed from moonlight, with an arm about her waist, but Tom knew that his hour was come. He was not in love for a minute or a day. It was all over with him, and he surrendered, with that pride and rapture peculiar to his race and sex in like circumstances. To the girl it was or seemed as pure a miracle as ever came to pass,

but she was content with it. How they talked (and Tom at least found his tongue in a minute or two) is no affair of yours or mine. It was all settled between them before the boat reached the quay, though the journey seemed disappointingly short, and when Mrs. Askin awoke at the bustle about her, Tom approached her resolutely, and led her ashore.

"Mrs. Askin," he said, when they had bade good night to the rest of their party, "I have news for you. Azubah and I are going to be married."

The old lady gasped, and would have sat down in the roadway if Tom had not already given her his arm.

"The Lord help you, sir," she said, "but the Squire will never overlook it, and you'll be no better than a fiddler to the end of your days."

CHAPTER XVII.

WHILST Tom was making the most of this new happiness of his, Baretti was painting away in London in an almost melodramatic gloom of spirit. He knew nothing of Tom's utter faithlessness to his love, and he still held himself bound by all the old ties of friendship, gratitude, and honour which had hitherto so strongly held him.

Most people were out of town, Baretti stayed behind and worked. Lording and Mary were in Switzerland, and the painter's heart if not his body

was with them. He would tear himself out of languor and despondency, and would work at his easel like a slave during the hours of light the long days of late summer afforded, but at night he would droop, and would sit alone with his unlighted pipe between his teeth, surveying a sorrowful and lonely future. There is no doubt he suffered more than he need have done, but that is true of most people. Half the troubles of the world are wantonly created or wantonly fomented, and when a young man is hopelessly in love he likes to suffer.

Yet everything was real enough to Baretti, and his own passionate temperament made his tongue-tied love a heavy burden to him. If he had been free to speak and then to go away somewhere! But to speak would have been to cover himself with dishonour and to sacrifice everything for which, in these late years, he had so intensely struggled. No, no, no. Everything he had and was, was Carroll's. It was Carroll who had saved him, Carroll to whom he owed all things. Not a whisper to dishonour the purity and completeness of his love for his preserver should ever pass his lips.

The devil tempted him, of course. Tom and Lording were far apart, and likely enough to be permanently divided. Tom was out in the cold, and Baretti was in the inmost circle of art and raking in money hand over hand. The poor fiddler's last chance of marrying the heiress was gone—the wealthy painter might speak and might have a chance with her. There was no great barrier of descent between them; Mary was simply a lady,

and Baretti had a right to claim to be called a gentleman.

No man lives entirely in the mill-wheel-round of one emotion, and no emotion is always equal in its forces. There were a thousand other things to think of in the world. But, after all, this was the dominant of Baretti's life, and was so present with him as to make other hopes, wishes, and concerns feeble beside it. Sometimes it was terrible to suffer, sometimes it was sweet to suffer, as lovers have a knack of ruling things. Altogether it would not be easy to exaggerate the virtue which held him so firmly to his gratitude, and so far away from his love. It has been said already that gratitude was a passion with him, but the passions are not alike in strength, and when gratitude wrestles against love, a dwarf is pitted against a giant.

The poor painter's greatest treasure, and solace, and torment was that first sketch he had made for Mary Lording's portrait. It drew him with a singular fascination in this time of loneliness, and he often took it from its hiding place and smoked his pipe before it in a mood of adoration, sometimes passionate, and sometimes tender. No saint ever had such yearnings towards his favourite shrine.

The fountain sparkled in the sunlight, and the garden gleamed behind the beautiful figure. The branches moved about her, and the summer breeze had caught that one loose wave of hair which lay across her forehead. Her eyes smiled welcome still, and her feet were ready to step from the canvas. Any man who has been in love can guess

what all this was to him, with what desires it filled him, with what despairs it wrung him.

He sat one evening looking at this portrait until the shadows began to gather pretty thickly and he could see it no longer. Then he arose and drew the curtains, and lit his lamps, and sat down again to his feast of grief and passion. Once he arose and kissed the face that smiled so upon him—a poor satisfaction as any lover may guess. But after that he began to pace the room in a new trouble.

"This," he said, as he went up and down, "is disloyal to the very heart of things. What right have I to think of her at all? I must tear her from my heart altogether. I must burn her portrait. I have no right to keep it. One of these days I shall lose all self-possession, and all I have suffered will be wasted. I must burn it!"

Burn it? It felt like burning his own heart—and burning the actual woman he loved along with it. The very smile the pictured face wore seemed to beseech him. He walked in great agitation for a time, pausing now and then to look at the smiling face.

"You must go," he said, at length, speaking under his breath. "We must part. You make me mad with longing, and fill me with traitorous thoughts. You must go. We must part."

He would wrap her in cerements of lead, and let her fall into the river where she could lie deep, and decay slowly, out of sight, as dead things should do. She would be dead then to him, and his passion was so strong that even this fanciful idea took such a hold of

him that he felt like a murderer in the contemplation of it. He marched up and down the room, but his thoughts were away in a peaceful reach of the Thames he knew, and over and over and over again he committed his treasure to its grave. He saw the water divide, and he watched the rip as they rounded and died away.

It was a sore struggle altogether, and only a lover could understand the man, or the battle that raged within him. But at last he made up his mind. It was altogether unwholesome for the soul to submit to the intoxication his thoughts before this picture brought him. Even if Mary were lost to Carroll for ever—even if that best and most generous and lovable of men must lose her and must bear the unspeakable pain of thinking her as in another man's embraces, it could never be Baretto's happiness that should bring such misery to his friend. All this was fiery, and high-flown, and romantic somewhat beyond the common run, but then it was in the man's nature, and to him it was all as real as his half-crowns are to a money-grubber, his patent to an inventor, his acres to a landowner, your grief to you.

A good share of a man's duties lie in the attempt to compel himself to feel that something is dearer than the dearest. With Baretto, as with countless thousands of men before him the choice lay between love and honour. Love was infinitely dearest, and therein lay a confession from which his soul revolted. He must, he would make honour yet dearer. How easy to let honour go, if only for a day or two, how hard to lose love for a

moment, how hard even to think of it. You can forgive the southern nature its little flashes of melodrama, its exultation in its own pain, its wanton blowing of the flames. When humbug grows melodramatic you know its hollow rant and stagey strides, its mouthing periods. You can laugh at all that with an excellent appetite for humour. But you forgive a little of what looks like play-acting to a man whose heart is in agony, who stands torn between love and honour, and fights away from love to cast in his lot with her cold enemy.

It took Baretti the whole of that night to win, but he won at last, and he knew that he had conquered. He took the picture from its place and set it in his arm-chair, with a lamp on either side of it, and he knelt down before it and said good-bye. He kissed the face with tears of last renunciation and farewell, and he laid the picture on the cushioned seat and laid his head upon it, and his arms around it.

It was bright morning outside by this time, but he knew nothing of that. There was some peace in his heart already, partly because nobody can go on suffering for ever, and pain brings relief by sheer fatigue at last, and partly because he knew that he had won the greatest fight of his life. No man but himself would ever know it, and if he had only fought for a fancy after all, yet what is life but thought? He had conquered, and in no thought of his heart could he ever be false to Carroll any more. But he was tired, and as he knelt there over the picture with his tumbled black curls resting on it he fell asleep.

The great Hoffmann had explored Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Edinburgh, all the giant places that lie outside London, and the smaller cities were now being awakened by the prospect of his coming. After Bristol, Gloucester lay next upon his programme, and this began to bring Tom nearer home again. In Worcester he had flatly refused to appear for reasons which are likely to be obvious.

When he had parted from Azubah on that fateful night, he had gone straight home to his hotel and had resigned himself to his own thoughts. They were somewhat wild and incoherent to begin with, and he was not at first so perfectly sure that he was happy as he felt he ought to have been. He was sufficiently divided from his father already, but this new step of his had widened the gap beyond closure. There was something to take the guilt off his joy and triumph in that reflection. Then Lording would know of it, and Mary would hear it. Well, it was done, and as he thought of the matter his heart warmed again in due time, and he was ready to face anything and everything.

It came quite suddenly into his mind that he had ample time to run up by the night mail and see Azubah's father. He would rather tell him of this by word of mouth than by letter, and he would like to take Baretti into his confidence too. Without giving himself time to grow cool on this fancy, he scrawled a hasty line to Azubah, and having packed his portmanteau and filled his cigar case, he set out by cab for the railway station,

and embarked upon his journey. He succeeded in getting a carriage to himself, tucked himself comfortably in his rug, set his portmanteau beneath his head for a pillow, and fell off to sleep quite joyously. From some cause or other the train was delayed, and he reached London more than an hour beyond his time. He was not sorry for this, since he had already arrived at a rather unholy sort of hour. He drank a cup of coffee at a coffee-house near the station, and then, portmanteau in hand, set out for his old residence in Montague Gardens. When he arrived the maid was cleaning the steps, and he gave her a beaming good-morning. She arose with a little scream of surprise, and stood wiping her hands on her apron and curtsying before him with a face of unmistakable welcome.

"Mr. Baretti is in town, I suppose?" said Tom.

"Oh! yes, sir," said the maid; "but I don't suppose you'll find him up yet."

"Never mind," returned Tom; "I'll wait in the studio until he awakes."

The maid opened the door and stood by for him to pass. He ascended the stairs with great quiet, and for a moment paused before the door which led to his old chambers with a passing wonder as to what manner of man lived in there now. Then he went upwards on tiptoe towards Baretti's rooms, and, turning the handle of the studio door almost stealthily, he entered. There were two lamps burning dimly and set on chairs, and, though it was broad daylight outside, everything was dusky and undefined within the room.

He walked forward and turned up the wick of one of the lamps, and, to his sudden terror and surprise, saw Baretti, half-kneeling, half-lying at the arm-chair between them. It seemed to Tom's eyes as if the painter had fallen there in a swoon. The first thing he did was to sweep aside the curtains, so that the light rushed in and left each lamp a sulky blot against the morning.

"Baretti," he cried, returning to the prostrate figure and seizing it by the shoulder. "Baretti, what is the matter?"

The painter awoke and staggered half blindly to his feet. Tom caught sight of the picture.

"You here, Carroll? What is the matter?"

Then Baretti caught sight of the picture also and remembered all, but being only half awakened snatched at it and took it to his breast to hide it. Not a second later he saw what he had done. His resolve had gone for nothing and he had betrayed himself.

"Baretti," said Tom, gently. "Baretti." There was a world of meaning in his voice to the painter's hearing. It sounded like the utterance of judgment on disloyalty. He had not a word to say. He had betrayed himself and Carroll could guess everything. "Let me look," said Tom, laying a hand upon the picture. Baretti surrendered it without resistance and stood before him, drooping his head like a man detected in a crime. "You never told me of this."

Nobody but a fool could have misread the case, and Tom, without pausing to ask himself a

question, knew it all. Baretti's look and attitude told everything.

"You always cared for her?" said Tom. "From the beginning?" He recalled things that had happened two or three years ago as if they had been affairs of yesterday. Baretti offered no answer, still reading in his friend's voice the voice of judgment. "You never spoke to me or her."

"Never," said Baretti. "Believe what you will of me but that." He spoke this with bent head, and an attitude altogether despairing, but suddenly he flashed upright in his own vehement way, and stood with clasped hands before his face—"Believe anything but that."

"God bless you, old fellow," cried Tom, throwing the picture away, and seizing the outstretched hands. "Tell me the truth. Tell me everything. Do you—care for her?" Baretti hung his head anew, and said nothing. "Be candid with me," said Tom. "I will be candid with you to begin with. I have news for you. I am engaged to be married."

Baretti stopped him before he could speak another word.

"I have cleared my heart of every weakness. I can be happy to see you happy."

"My dear, dear old fellow," cried Tom, wringing the painter's hands. "Let us play at no cross purposes. You are in love with Miss Lord-
ing. Tell me the truth." Baretti hung his head again and said nothing. "And you have hidden it for my sake? Well—go and woo and win her, man, and wear her worthily."

Baretti stared at him like a madman.

"My dear fellow," cried Tom, "I am engaged to be married, as I told you. I haven't thought of Miss Lording for a year and a half past."

Baretti glared at him and then fairly blazed: "You threw her away?"

"Congratulate me, Baretti," said Tom, half hysterically, for his curious interview had shaken him. "I am going to be married early in September. I came up to town," he hurried on, not daring to pause, "on purpose to tell you. You remember Miss Moore, you have no idea——"

He stopped short there suddenly. Even to a friend like Baretti he could not say the things that were sacrilegious to himself. How she had improved? How she had altered for the better? He was in love with her, and he knew perfectly well (as your true lover always does) that she was worth ten thousands of him. And yet he had been on the edge of such a blasphemy of her perfections.

Life-long habit against new-grown passion. But even if he had not been her lover, the gentleman's instinct would have pulled him up.

"You are engaged to Miss Moore?" said Baretti like a man in a dream.

"I am engaged to Miss Moore," said Tom, "and we are to be married in September."

"Carroll," cried Baretti, "I have wasted more repentance than ever was wasted before. You shall know, my friend, you shall know. I thought you loved her. And I knelt last night before her picture and said good-bye to her; and put her away out of my heart."

"You care for her?" said Tom again. "I have been like a blind man, Baretti. You have cared for her all along."

"I loved her," said Baretti, looking straight in his friend's eyes, "from the first hour I ever saw her. That was why I ran away to Naples."

"No man ever wished a friend good fortune with a better heart," said Tom, shaking Baretti's hands once more.

The painter for the first time returned the pressure, and, suddenly turning away, hurried into his bedroom. Tom, being thus left alone, forbore to follow, but sat down and half mechanically lit a cigar. When he had thrown away the picture it had fallen face downwards on the seat of the arm-chair, and he stretched forth a hand and set it up so that he could see it. Any but a blind man would have had to confess that the face was lovely, but that he looked at it with a sort of wonder he had ever loved it. It lacked the something he knew now. There was not a fault in it. It was not only beautiful, but it looked good, and true, and honest and amiable. It spoke all womanly virtues and sweetness, and he had loved the woman it presented to him once, and loved her loyally. And yet he knew a sweeter face, not so beautiful and infinitely more beautiful, and he was contented enough with his own prospects. There is just a likelihood that he had seen love in the one face and had not seen it in the other. Mary's look had never flattered that lofty and delicate egotism which is, after all, a part of a man's love, though he rarely guesses it. In ninety

cases out of a hundred it is the woman's worship that wins a lasting love, and in the remaining ten her cool disdain.

But it is a bold game to analyse where analysis must necessarily give offence, and be the more offensive in proportion to its truthfulness. I might make confession, but my friends may not be in the humour.

Tom smoked for an hour well contented, and at the end of that time Baretti, who had moved with such sly silence that his friend had not heard a sound, emerged from his bedroom, dragging a big portmanteau after him. He was dressed as if for a journey, and he hung his head in a mingled tremor of joy and shamefacedness.

"Why, what is this?" said Tom with a semblance of gaiety.

"I am going to Switzerland," said Baretti.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN the news came to Thomas Carroll the elder that nephew Mark was being hunted as a perjurer and that son Thomas had been set free and pronounced blameless, it was naturally a shock to him. For once in his life (he had to confess it to himself) he had been mistaken. The impossible had happened, and after that one might be ready to believe in almost anything.

He, Thomas Carroll, of Trench House, Overhill, had made a mistake, and after his recognition of that fact the universe might well seem topsy-

turvy. He did not hold his head so well up as he used to do, and he began to age with astonishing rapidity. His old public haunts knew him no more; he had spoken his last pompous judgment from the bench, attended his last licensing meeting, taken the chair at the last agricultural dinner. He was old, he was friendless, he was lonely, and he had been horribly ill-used. If Tom had come to him to beg his pardon and to promise an atonement for the future, he could almost have found it in his heart to forgive him and to take him back again.

The clergyman of the parish called and tried to make peace between Mr. Carroll and Tom, and made so little by his movement that he vowed never to enter the house again.

"You are all very well in your way, no doubt, sir," said Mr. Carroll, "and you perform to my satisfaction the duties of the position to which I appointed you; but in presuming to advise me, sir, you forget yourself."

A clergyman advising Lording, for instance, would have seemed a natural spectacle enough—the representative of the Church had a constitutional right to advise—but to preach to him? His gall had not been so stirred for many a day.

Yet, thinking things over, he was more and more inclined to hope that Tom would come and beg his pardon and renounce his present mode of life and become a gentleman once more. Of course the lad had been to blame, but he had suffered beyond his deserts; and the old gentleman was so far softened that he was prepared

to be flattered and appealed to and made much of. He felt wonderfully magnanimous when he thought of his own readiness to accept Tom's apology and repentance, and he felt oftentimes extremely angry that Tom did not take advantage of his generosity.

The one thing which made Tom at all noticeable to the elder Carroll was the fact that he bore his own charmed name. He knew nothing of his growing musical fame, or the curious interest with which the public mind surrounded him. But the newspapers were wiser, and Tom was a celebrity. The great man's amazement when he met his own name in print in close connection with Azubah Moore's and Tom's was a thing only to be described as superlative. "We understand," said the great daily intelligencer of fashion, "that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Thomas Carroll, the well-known composer, and Miss Moore, of Overhill. The lady is a daughter of a tenant on the estate of Mr. Carroll, senior."

When the first shock of amazement was over, Mr. Carroll senior contented himself for a little while by the stiffest possible certainty that the whole story was a lie. Tom seemed to be a mark for scandal of one sort or another. By-and-by this certainty began to loosen and to spread into a tangle of *uncertainty*, and at last, after a day or two, he cut out the paragraph which had so amazed him, gummed it to a sheet of letter paper and wrote beneath it:

"SIR,—Oblige me by contradicting this report.

"Yours, &c.,

"THOMAS CARROLL."

When he had folded up this lordly note and had directed and sealed it, he began to doubt whether he would send it after all. He set it, in this indecision, in one of the drawers in his writing-desk and locked it there, and every day his sense of dignity and his wishes had a fight together when he went to look at the note and debated whether he should send it. One morning not more than a week after he had read the announcement of Tom's impending marriage, he saw at his solitary breakfast-table another proclamation which took him by surprise. "We understand," said Fashion's intelligencer, "that a marriage has been arranged between Mr. Antonio Baretti, A.R.A., and Mary, only daughter of Mr. Lording, of Beech Tree Hall, Worcestershire."

Surely the world was upside down.

People called upon him at times, and he was not altogether shut in from the world. He heard and even invited opinions upon the astounding news above recorded. It became evident to him that the world at large had gone mad, and he began to be seriously of belief that he was the only sane man left in the country.

Still reading day by day the columns of the intelligencer of Fashion, he found one morning a record of the marriage of Mr. Antonio Baretti, A.R.A., and Mary, only daughter of Charles Lording, Esq. Scarcely had he read this

through than he fell upon "CARROLL—MOORE," and read that Thomas Carroll and Azubah Moore were also united in the bonds of matrimony. The first thing he did was to ring his bell, and this summons being answered by the butler, he gave him solemn warning and a cheque for six months' wages. Then he sent for the other servants one by one and dismissed and paid each of them, down to coachman, groom, and stable-boy. The domestics, consulting with each other, believed that they saw a peculiar something in his manner, and determined to send for a doctor. The doctor came and managed to pretend a casual visit, To his surprise the master of the house received him with open hands.

"You arrive at an auspicious moment," he said graciously, "and I am glad to welcome the first volunteer in favour of my scheme."

"I do not as yet," said the doctor, cautiously, "fully understand your scheme, sir."

"No?" said Mr. Carroll, with a pitying smile. "I had thought it clear even to the world's intelligence."

Doctor Morton began to be sure of what the servants had only suspected.

"Pardon my dulness, Mr. Carroll," he said, with suavity and submission, "may I beg that you will be good enough to instruct me?"

"With pleasure," said the master of the house. "My asylum is open to the world at large, but I receive volunteers only. You display some power of reflection by coming here at all, and I have hope of your ultimate cure."

"I am happy to hear you say so," returned

the doctor, beginning to see his way. "I shall be delighted if you will undertake my case."

"Morton," said Mr. Carroll, "you have lucid moments. I have hope of you."

"I trust, sir," said the Doctor, shrewdly, "that you may be induced to extend your benevolence to at least one or two of your old servants."

"Nothing will delight me more," he answered, majestically. "But not one of them has made submission."

After some further parley, the Doctor secured leave to act as Carroll's ambassador, and took advantage of the first moment of absence to wire to Tom that his father was in a serious condition, and that it would be necessary for him at once to call upon the family lawyer in town. Next he wired to the family lawyer, and then gave the servants instructions to stay in the house for the time being. Should they meet their master, they were to agree to everything he said.

Mr. Carroll watched the doctor with great care, and had more and more hope of his recovery. The Doctor held the situation with great skill, but, do all he could, he was unable to keep the news from the village. Before either Tom or the family lawyer could arrive the whole population of Overhill knew that the Squire's intellect had given way. His delusion was that the whole world was mad, and that he, being the only sane creature left in it, was appointed to be its deliverer. He was absolutely harmless, and no more pompous in his manner than of old. He introduced the Doctor to people about the village

as a promising patient, and held him up as an example to be followed.

Tom and the lawyer arrived together, and he welcomed them as an accession to his stock of likely cases.

"My dear Tom," he said suavely, "I could wish that I had adopted this course earlier. But it is only of late days that I have become convinced of the truth, and in judging you at the time I made no allowance for the general mental aberration of the world. It is not yet recognised, but in time it will be. The whole world is mad. Providence has been pleased to spare me from the general affliction, and I shall make it my humble duty to inaugurate a cure. I can hope to do no more, for the span of life is brief and the task promises to be almost endless."

All this was very terrible for Tom to listen to, but he got through with it as well as he could, and assented to everything.

"I believe you are married, Tom?" said the elder, after a pause.

"Yes, sir," returned Tom, dreading an outburst which might result in damage.

"A total abolition of association between the sexes would perhaps be the shortest way to an universal cure," said his father calmly. "But that cannot be hoped for. The best thing you can do will be to bring your wife here and allow her to be placed under my control and influence. If she assents willingly—not otherwise. I am too hampered by want of time to undertake the hopeless

cases. The only way with them will be to let them die out."

All things considered, this seemed the wisest thing to do for the moment, even though a mad-man had suggested it.

The man of law went back to his business, and when he was questioned as to his client's sanity, he had but one answer:—

"Mr. Carroll says now what he thought always."

This was no doubt a somewhat crude presentation of the case, but there was a taste of truth in it.

Tom could not desert his father at such a time as this, and Azubah would not be separated from her husband. So they took up their abode at Trench House, and in spite of their affection for each other, were but a sad young pair of married lovers for a month or two. Mr. Carroll treated them with great kindness.

"I compel your will in nothing," he would say. "My aim is to inspire by example."

So they did whatever they wished and had perfect freedom; but there was always a shade upon the house, and upon their hearts.

The county neighbours were, of course, all anxiety to see Tom's rustic bride. They found out by-and-by that the parish church was the only place in which they had a chance of seeing her, and those who were far a-field from Overhill got invitations from the local magnates, and went to church with the laudable purpose of staring at her. The concert platform is a school in

which a woman can learn a look of perfect self-possession, and Azubah had learned it. When the county magnates stared at the rustic bride, they saw a lady of charming aspect, who moved as gracefully and naturally as a bird flies or a fish swims. Walking is a rare art amongst English women, and she had it to perfection. She was so dressed that her dress might have been born with her and grown up with her—the result of artistic taste and a simple nature. When they heard her speak—and only a few of them as yet had the opportunity—they made note of a voice singularly soft and liquid. This pleasing organ was set to good English without a trace of rusticity in its tone. They were bound to own that she looked like a lady, talked like a lady, and bore herself like a lady, and having been compelled to these admissions, they agreed gravely that it was easy to acquire a veneer of good manners.

Now, you veneer worthless woods, but good ones you are content to polish. Nobody veneers ebony, satinwood, or walnut. These have their good looks internally, and in like manner and for like reason Tom's wife stood in need of no veneer. Even the county magnates have found this out by now, for the world is at large good-natured, and can forget its own egotisms if you give it time.

Mr. Carroll kept his asylum and watched his keeper with kindly dignity and diligence for the space of one year. At the end of that time he slept with his fathers, and was lamented. His year of madness was marked by a wonderful gentleness towards all people, and he was the very pink of

courtesy. The only sane in a world of lunatics, he made allowances, and nothing perturbed him. Had he lasted longer, he might have lived to be as well-beloved as any man in the county, for there was a sweetness about him which few could resist. Everybody humoured him and was gentle with him in remembrance of his affliction; and he, pitying that affliction in all mankind, humoured everybody, and was gentle with high and low.

A year later (and that comparatively is but the other day) the heir to Trench House began really to take the place in the world to which his position, his abilities and his nature gave him title. There is no man happier and there are few more prosperous, though there are many who might beat him at the game of counting sovereigns.

There was a little odd strangeness for awhile between Tom and Baretti. You see that Mrs. Baretti had once been engaged to Tom, and that the engagement had never been formally annulled when both the faithless ones got married. That feeling wore away, and they are as staunch friends as ever. Baretti lives at Beech Tree Hall and paints there, and Lording is prodigiously proud of him. A masterpiece of portraiture which hangs in the dining-room at this hour represents an old gentleman of genial British aspect, in a dressing-gown, looking at a young lady of lovely exterior, who has an olive-coloured half-nude young rascal in her lap; a lad with beautiful limbs, and eyes, and curls like Baretti's.

Tom is at work on a new opera which is to give England a right to claim a place in the world

of music. Barette swears it, and when men talk of Wagner, or Verdi, or Gounod as possible rivals to Tom Carroll, he shrugs his shoulders and abandons discussion. To Tom's mind Barette is the greatest painter in the world, and they are bosom friends still, and likely to be.

"Carroll," said the little man one night as they sat together in a half-darkness by the fireside after dinner at Tom's house. "Carroll, are you happy?"

"As the day is long," said Tom. "And so are you?"

"There is no man happier in the world," returned the painter. He arose and paced up and down in the old way. "It is strange," he said, after a long pause, "but everything is strange. It was a villain's struggle to damage *you* which made *me* happy. He left you unharmed in the long run, too."

"Poor Mark," said Tom. "It was a bitter close to a sad chapter, Barette."

"I thank God solemnly that he died in prison," said Barette. "I thank God solemnly that there is yet to be found here and there a touch of justice in the world. I thank God that he lives no longer to blot an honourable name and to be a thorn in the best and gentlest heart I ever knew."

THE END.

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